NATION

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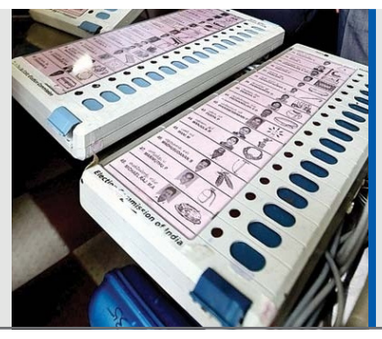

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Modi says J&K will get statehood soon

Modi also assures state will have Assembly polls

UDHAMPUR, 12 APRIL

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday assured that the Centre is committed to restoring statehood to Jammu and Kashmir adding that assembly elections will also be held soon.

"The time is not far when assembly elections will be held in Jammu and Kashmir also. Jammu and Kashmir will get back its state status. You will be able to share your dreams with your MLAs, and your ministers," Modi said while addressing a public rally in Udhampur.The Prime Minister said that whatever he has done so far is only serves as a trailer of the work that he is yet to do in the region. He pointed out that now after decades, elections were taking place in Jammu and Kashmir without fear of terrorism and cross border firing. "Vikas bhi ho raha hai, vishvaas bhi badh raha hai" (there is progress and confidence), the Prime Minister said. The state of Jammu and Kashmir was reorganized into a union territory in October 2019. The Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization Act 2019 was passed in 2019, and Article 370 of the Constitution of India, which gave special status to Jammu and Kashmir, was abrogated. The central government had in August 2019 abrogated Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir and bifurcated it into two Union Territories, Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh. The upcoming general election, said the Prime Minister is "not just to elect a member of Parliament but to form a strong government in the country. When the government is strong, it completes by challenging the challenges..."

Underscoring the latest development witness in Jammu and Kashmir, PM Modi said, "Now schools are not burnt here, but schools are decorated. BJP has fielded Union Minister Jitendra Singh from Udhampur who has been representing the constituency since 2014. Singh had defeated former Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad from Udhampur in 2014. —*ANI*

BJP supporters during a public meeting to be addressed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Udhampur, Friday ***PHOTO: PTI***

Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses a public rally ahead of the upcoming Lok Sabha election, in Udhampurdistrict, Friday ***PHOTO: PTI***

Modi's claims

1. **Because of the govt's timely intervention...there has been a marked improvement...**
2. **Democracy like India is able to move ahead and function only because there is a vibrant feedback mechanism.**
3. **A few people in India and in the West .... make dubious claims of diminishing media freedom.**

-Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

Rahul promises 30L govt jobs in TN rally

Rahul Gandhi also dubbed NEET anti-poor

TIRUNELVELI, 12 APRIL

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Friday assured a legislation to provide apprenticeship to young people and filling 30 lakh vacant government jobs.

Addressing his first election rally in Tamil Nadu, Rahul Gandhi dubbed the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) anti-poor. "I know, the people of Tamil Nadu have a big issue with NEET. We are going to leave the decision to the state; on whether you want to do NEET or not to do NEET. NEET is an anti-poor exam and we are more than happy to allow you (Tamil Nadu) to take a decision on whether or not to take the exam."

The Centre labels Tamil Nadu's request for flood relief as "Pitchai," a plea made to seek "alms," Gandhi alleged. DMK and Congress have been alleging that BJP leader Nirmala Sitharaman belittled flood relief as "pitchai."

Outlining the features of Congress party's 2024 LS polls manifesto, he said if INDIA bloc is voted to power at the Centre, "drastic action" will be taken to provide employment opportunities to the young people.

There are 30 lakh vacant jobs in the government and these jobs will be provided to young people, he said and added that in order to benefit all the graduates and diploma holders a law--Right to Apprenticeship--will be passed in the Parliament.

Slamming BJP, Gandhi alleged the Saffron party MPs openly stated that "they are going to change the Constitution" if they retained power at the Centre.

He alleged that the whole idea of the BJP is to make sure that three or four of India's richest people benefit. —*PTI*

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi during a public meeting in Coimbatore, Friday ***PHOTO: PTI***

- The Centre labels Tamil Nadu's request for flood relief as "Pitchai," a plea made to seek "alms," Gandhi alleged.

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India lost 2.33M hectares tree cover since 2000

NEW DELHI, 12 APRIL

India has lost 2.33 million hectares of tree cover since 2000, equivalent to a six per cent decrease in tree cover during this period, according to the latest data from the Global Forest Watch monitoring project.

The Global Forest Watch, which tracks forest changes in near real-time using satellite data and other sources, said the country lost 4,14,000 hectares of humid primary forest (4.1 per cent) from 2002 to 2023, making up 18 per cent of its total tree cover loss in the same period.

Between 2001 and 2022, it said, forests in India emitted 51 million tons of carbon dioxide equivalent a year and removed 141 million tons of carbon dioxide equivalent a year. This represents a net carbon sink of 89.9 million tons of carbon dioxide equivalent a year.

An average of 51.0 million tons of carbon dioxide equivalent per year was released into the atmosphere as a result of tree cover loss in India. In total, 1.12 gigatons of carbon dioxide equivalent was emitted during this period.

Forests are both a sink and a source for carbon, removing carbon dioxide from the air when standing or regrowing and emitting it when cleared or degraded. Loss of forests, thus, accelerates climate change.

The maximum tree cover loss of 189,000 hectares occurred in 2017. The country lost 175,000 hectares of tree cover in 2016 and 144,000 hectares in 2023, the highest in the last six years.

The GFW data showed that five states accounted for 60 per cent of all tree cover loss between 2001 and 2023.

From 2001 to 2022, Odisha had the highest rate of tree cover loss due to fires with an average of 238 hectares lost per year. —*PTI*

- Forests are both a sink and a source for carbon, removing carbon dioxide from the air when standing or regrowing and emitting it when cleared or degraded

RAMESHWARAM CAFE

Bengaluru blast: NIA nabs 2 in WB

BENGALURU, 12 APRIL

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) have arrested the mastermind behind the Rameshwaram cafe blast on Friday. The bomber Mussavir Hussain Shazib and his accomplice Abdul Matheen Taha, carrying Rs 10 lakh reward was arrested from a hideout on the outskirts of Kolkata city in West Bengal.

Shazib alias Shazeb, 30, is a resident of Thirthahalli town in Shivamogga district. Another conspirator, Taahaa alias Matheen alias Taha alias Vignesh D alias Sumit, was also wanted in other cases.

Confirming the arrests, West Bengal Police department said that, "Two suspects in the blast case have been arrested from Purba Medinipur in a joint operation by the West Bengal Police and the Central intelligence agencies.

Shazib has been using the forged driving license in the name of Mohammed Juned Sayed to conceal his identity. The accused has also been using Hindu identity documents, forged Aadhaar in the name of Vignesh.

An accused in the Bengaluru Cafe blast case being produced at court by NIA officials, in Kolkata, Friday ***PHOTO: PTI***

The low intensity Improvised Explosive Device (IED) bomb was manufactured at Cuddalore in Tamil Nadu. Mussavir had carried the bomb to Bengaluru and met Taha in KR Puram locality here in the City. The NIA took over the case on 3 March and identified the main accused, Mussavir, who had carried out the blast. Earlier, the NIA had announced the arrest of Muzamil Shareef, a key conspirator in the cafe blast case.

NIA investigations have revealed that Shareef extended logistic support to the other two identified accused in the case, involving in an IED explosion in the cafe located at ITPL Road, Brookfield in Bengaluru on 1 March.

Several staff members were injured, some of them grievously, in the blast, which caused extensive damage to the property. Medical tests of the accused were conducted at a state-run hospital before their production at a metropolitan court here on Friday. They were taken to Bankshall court for transit remand, an NIA lawyer said. —*Salar News/PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

NDA won't get enough seats to form govt: CM

MYSURU, 12 APRIL

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Friday said that while the INDIA bloc may not get an absolute majority in the elections, the NDA won't get enough seats either to form the government at the Centre. Speaking about the Lok Sabha election prospects of the Congress in the State, the senior party leader expressed confidence that his party would win 15-20 seats in Karnataka. He also reiterated that he will not stay in electoral politics after four years. —*PTI*

Indian staff relocated from Myanmar consulate

NEW DELHI, 12 APRIL

India on Friday said it relocated its staff from its consulate in Myanmarese city of Sittwe to Yangon in view of the security situation in that region of Myanmar. External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said India is closely monitoring the situation adding the Indian consulate in Mandalay remains functional. Myanmar have been witnessing fighting between the military junta and resistance forces. —*PTI*

CAUTION AMID WAR

Don't travel to Iran and Israel, says MEA

NEW DELHI, 12 APRIL

Amid on-going tensions between Iran and Israel, the Ministry of External Affairs issued a travel advisory to Indian citizens on Friday and asked them to refrain from travelling to both countries until further notice.

The ministry further asked people who are currently in Iran or Israel to contact Indian embassies and register themselves.

"In view of the prevailing situation in the region, all Indians are advised not to travel to Iran or Israel till further notice. All those who are currently residing in Iran or Israel are requested to get in touch with Indian Embassies there and register themselves," the MEA said in an official release.

Moreover, they further urged the Indians residing in these two countries to take precautions about their safety.

"They are also requested to observe utmost precautions about their safety and restrict their movements to the minimum," the statement added.

Earlier this year, a drive to recruit more than 10,000 Indian construction workers in Israel began at the Maharshi Dayanand University in Haryana's Rohtak.

Last week, MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said that the first batch of people have gone to Israel under the government-to-government (G2G) agreement, stressing that the Indian government has urged the Israeli authorities to take their safety seriously.

He further highlighted that around 18,000 Indian workers are in Israel.

Earlier this month, Israel carried out numerous strikes on Iran-backed targets in Syria, often targeting weapons shipments intended for Hezbollah, a powerful Iranian proxy in Lebanon.

But the targeting of the embassy itself marks a significant escalation since embassies are considered the sovereign territory of the nations they represent, CNN reported.

Iran vowed to take revenge after Israel's airstrike on Iran's embassy complex in Syria, which killed at least seven officials. Mohammed Reza Zahedi, a top commander in Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards (IRGC), and senior commander Mohammad Hadi Haji Rahimi were among those killed, according to Iran's Foreign Ministry.

Additionally, at least six Syrian citizens were also killed, Iranian state television reported.

Israel has intensified its military campaign against Iran and its regional proxies following the 7 October attack on Israel by Palestinian group Hamas, which killed about 1,200 people and more than 200 were taken hostage. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 6

The ministry further asked people who are currently in Iran or Israel to contact Indian embassies and register themselves ***PHOTO: ANI***

3 injured in Manipur clash, security beefed up

IMPHAL, 12 APRIL

As many as three people were injured in a gunfight between armed village volunteers and unidentified gunmen at Pelyang village in Manipur's Tengnoupal district on Friday, officials said.

"There was a gunfight between Meitei and Kuki insurgents at Pelyang village in Tengnoupal district, around 25 km from the boundary of Thoubal at Heirok," police said.

"Three Meitei insurgents sustained injuries, but they are currently stable. The incident took place under Machi police station in Tengnoupal district. Meitei women have taken out rallies in some areas in protest against the attack by Kukis," police added.

Meanwhile, additional state and central police forces have been rushed to the area to bring the situation under control, they said.

In another development, unknown men torched a saw mill near Pallel in Kakching district adjacent to Thoubal district in the early hours of Friday. —*PTI*

Central police forces have been deployed to bring the situation under control ***PHOTO: PTI***

City doctor arrested for 74 illegal abortions

BENGALURU, 12 APRIL

The City police have arrested a doctor from Aasare Hospital over allegations of carrying out illegal abortions of 74 foetuses at Nelamangala. The owner of the hospital, Dr Ravikumar, is accused of conducting abortions without the necessary permits under the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act. Health and Family Welfare Department officer Manjunath raided the hospital following the allegations. The case is registered under Sections 312, 313, 315, and 316 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). In 2023, in Mandya a team of doctors who used a jaggery unit as an ultrasound scanning centre was arrested. They conducted around 900 illegal female foetus abortions in the past two years. In light of the recent events, the Karnataka Health Department has issued a deadline to collect data from all scanning centres in the State. *—Salar News*

CCB rescues 47 children from begging mafia

BENGALURU, 12 APRIL

A City Central Crime Branch (CCB) from the Women and Child Welfare Department has rescued 47 children who were found begging near a mosque in Pulikeshi Nagar police station limits during the Ramzan festival. As part of the rescue operation, 36 women suspected to be involved in the case have been detained by CCB police for interrogation. The operation was carried out to curb the exploitation of children, who had been deprived of education and forced into roadside begging by miscreants. The rescued children, from infants to 12 years old, have been handed over to the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) by the authorities. A case has been registered under Section 370 (4) (minor trafficking) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Sections 80 (adopting a child without following procedures) and 81 (selling the child) of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act. Salar News. *—Salar News*

KPTCL worker jumps to death from flyover

BENGALURU, 12 APRIL

A contract worker of Karnataka Power Transmission Corporation Limited (KPTCL) died by suicide on Friday morning. The deceased, Naveen Kumar, 30, jumped from the Nayandahalli Flyover. The mishap happened at around 8.20 am. According to police, Kumar was going through personal issues and had allegedly consumed drugs before jumping from the building. Kumar, who had joined KPTCL about 3-4 months ago and had been married for just two months. The Byatarayanapura police rushed to the spot upon receiving the information. If you need emotional support, please call Arogya Sahayavani (104), SAHAI (080 25497777, 9886444075), Sa-Mudra Yuva Helpline (9880396331) 250. *—Salar News*

DSU receives A+ accreditation from NAAC

BENGALURU, 12 APRIL

Dayananda Sagar University (DSU) has achieved A+ accreditation from the esteemed National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) in its maiden cycle, marking a significant milestone in its pursuit of academic excellence. DSU is proud to be the first and only State Private University in South India to achieve this distinction, adding to Bengaluru and Karnataka State's prestige. NAAC, known for its rigorous evaluation process, thoroughly assessed DSU's infrastructure, faculty, curriculum, student support services, research performance, and community engagement. The accreditation underscores DSU's commitment to upholding high standards in teaching, research, and outreach. *—Salar News*

Constitution does not allow laws like UCC: HM

'If anyone is against the law of the land, punish them'

TUMAKURU, 12 APRIL

Karnataka Home Minister and Congress leader Dr G Parameshwara on Friday said that the Constitution provides the opportunity to practice any faith people want and it does not allow laws such as the Uniform Civil Code to be brought in a democratic country.

"Our Constitution provides an opportunity to practice any faith you want to. You have also allowed those people to stay in India. They are born, brought up, and dying here and you try to meddle with their social life, and societal commitments. Do you want to call them second-set grade citizens in this country? The Constitution does not provide for such laws to be brought in and why do you want to send them to Pakistan? If they are against the law of the land, punish them," the Congress leader told.

G Parameshwara *PHOTO: PTI*

Coming down heavily on the ruling government, Parameshwara said that either BJP does not think of India as a democratic country or they don't want a democracy. "BJP leadership thinks that this is not a democracy or they don't want a democracy. That is why now we as Congressmen keep saying that democracy is in danger, protect the democracy," he said.

When asked about whether the Agniveer scheme, is an option to reduce unemployment in the country, the Karnataka Minister said that there's a ceiling in the Army, Navy, and Air Force regarding the limited recruitment, so first the government should fill those vacancies.

> They are born, brought up, and dying here and you try to meddle with their social life, and societal commitments. Do you want to call them second-set grade citizens in this country? Constitution does not provide for such laws to be brought in, why do you want to send them to Pakistan?

"How will you do that? You already have a ceiling in the Army, Navy and Air Force that you can recruit only these many people. There are 30,00,000 sanctioned vacant places in GoI. Why don't you fill them? What stops you from filling those vacancies? Instead of Agniveer, already sanctioned vacancies are there in govt, fill them up and give them employment. There are people who are well qualified. My appeal to Prime Minister Modi is to fill these vacancies so that at least youngsters will get employment," he said.

The Agniveer Scheme was announced in June 2022 for recruitment in the armed forces. The scheme is meant only for recruiting soldiers and not officers in the forces. The soldiers recruited under this Agneepath scheme are known as Agniveers.

Under the scheme, the three services are recruiting youths between the age bracket of 17-and-half years and 21 years for four years with a provision to retain 25 per cent of them for 15 more years. For 2022, the upper age limit was extended to 23 years.

Karnataka, which has 28 Lok Sabha seats, will vote in two phases on 26 April and 7 May. *—ANI*

NIA ARRESTS TWO

Rameshwaram Café blast: BJP hits out at Cong

BENGALURU, 12 APRIL

As the NIA arrested two key accused, including the mastermind, in Bengaluru Rameshwaram Café blast case in West Bengal on Friday, BJP lashed out at ruling Congress in Karnataka for allegedly trying to give a twist to the incident and portray it as an outcome of business rivalry.

Mussavir Hussain Shazib and Abdul Matheen Ahmed Taahaa were traced to their hideout near Kolkata, and apprehended by NIA team, BJP State General Secretary Ashwath Narayan Gowda alleged that Congress had given statements that diverted the attention of investigation teams.

"Congress called the incident an outcome of business rivalry. They gave similar statements after the cooker bomb blast case in Mangaluru and called the accused innocent," Gowda said, alleging that Congress has "no concern for public safety and national security". Taking into X Karnataka BJP unit said, "NIA detains 'Brothers' of Congress in Rameshwaram Blast Case. Ever Since Jihadi Tipu Sultan's admirers came to power in Karnataka, terrorists have got a free ride.

The only guarantee that Siddaramaiah has fulfilled is converting prosperous Karnataka into a terror hub."

"Karnataka is becoming a hub of terror activities and terrorists are finding a safe haven in the states ruled by the political parties of INDIA bloc," Gowda alleged. "Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, his deputy DK Shivakumar and Home Minister G Parameshwara should answer about the responsibility of Congress and its INDIA bloc partners on national security," he said. *—Salar News*

People want INDIA; BJP copying guarantees: Kharge

KALABURAGI, 12 APRIL

Congress President M Mallikarjun Kharge on Friday claimed there is an invisible undercurrent in favour of the Opposition INDIA bloc in the coming Lok Sabha polls, fearing which Prime Minister Narendra Modi is campaigning extensively.

He challenged Modi to take an oath on Rama statue in Ayodhya temple and say whether he gave the promised Rs 15 lakh to each individual from the black money he is supposed to have brought back to the country, doubled the income of farmers, provided two crore jobs and gave minimum support price to farmers.

"He chants god's name and crushes poor people with price rises. If poor people are surviving, it's because of MGNREGA Scheme and the five guarantees of Congress government in Karnataka," the former union minister said.

Congress President M Mallikarjun Kharge *PHOTO: PTI*

Kharge made the comments addressing a public gathering while campaigning for his son-in-law Radhakrishna Doddamani, who has filed his nomination from Kalaburagi for the coming Lok Sabha elections.

Kharge had won Lok Sabha elections in 2009 and 2014 but lost to BJP candidate Umesh Jadhav in 2019.

Kharge accused BJP of indulging in destabilising Opposition-ruled governments in some states. "You did it in Karnataka, Maharashtra, Goa, and Madhya Pradesh. Everywhere you destroyed parties and formed your government. These are the democratic principles of Modi and Shah."

"He comes and says this is Modi's Guarantee. We gave five guarantees, which we have implemented (in Karnataka). Modi is copying our guarantees. He says 'Modi Ki Guarantee' but where is his guarantee?" Kharge asked. *—PTI*

TIME TO CAMPAIGN

Congress Bengaluru Central candidate Mansoor Ali Khan campaigns at Gandhinagar along with minister Dinesh Gundu Rao on Friday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

No BJP wave, only Cong's five guarantee waves: DyCM

KALABURAGI, 12 APRIL

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister and Congress leader DK Shivakumar on Friday denied BJP wave in the State and said there is only Congress and five guarantee waves.

"A big trend is going on here. There is no wave of BJP in State. It is only a Congress wave and five guarantee wave which has been there. Congress party will win more than 20 seats in Karnataka... There will be a change in Karnataka. His party (JDS) is going to merge with BJP or BJP will throw them out of their NDA," said Shivakumar.

Taking a jibe at JD(S) Chief and former prime minister HD Deve Gowda and his son, also the former chief minister HD Kumaraswamy, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, said that how both leaders will strengthen their party if their family members will be contesting from BJP.

"How can Kumaraswamy and Gowda field their family members from BJP and build the JD(S) party?" quipped Shivakumar.

DK Shivakumar *PHOTO: ANI*

Shivakumar was speaking at the KPCC office after the joining of JD(S) leader Akkuroddi Shivanna and other leaders and workers to Congress party on Thursday night.

"Within five months of coming to power, we have implemented all the guarantee schemes of Grilahakshmi, Grihajyoti, Annabhagya, Shakti and Yuvanidhi," he said.

"If our government comes at centre, we have given many schemes, including 1 lakh per year for poor women, 1 lakh per year for youth, and health insurance up to 25 lakhs for farmers and workers, *—ANI*

KALABURAGI IN SPOTLIGHT

Eshwarappa, Doddamani file nominations

BENGALURU, 12 APRIL

Former deputy chief minister and senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader KS Eshwarappa, has filed his nomination as an Independent candidate for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls from the Shivamogga constituency. Known for his key role in building BJP's presence in the State, Eshwarappa was enraged over the candidature of the son of former chief minister BS Yediyurappa, BY Raghavendra from Shivamogga. Raghavendra has also filed his nominations on Friday. In Kalaburagi, the son-in-law of Congress President M Mallikarjun Kharge, Radhakrishna Doddamani, filed his nomination papers. He was accompanied by Deputy Chief Minister and State Congress Chief DK Shivakumar. Hitting out at the alleged dynasty politics in the State, he said, "I cannot idly witness one of his sons appointed as Union Minister, another appointed as BJP State Unit President, and the preparations for the Chief Minster post underway. State BJP is under the control of the Yediyurappa family, and I am determined to liberate the party from their influence."

In Kalaburagi, the son-in-law of Congress President M Mallikarjun Kharge, Radhakrishna Doddamani, filed his nomination papers *PHOTO: X@DKSHIVKUMAR*

The 76-year-old rebel leader, often considered the face of the OBCs and the Kuruba community, expressed his dissatisfaction after BJP did not field his son for the Haveri Lok Sabha seat. Speaking to reporters, Eshwarappa said, "I will dedicate my victory to the feet of Prime Minister Narendra Modi if I win this year's Lok Sabha seat". According to BJP sources, Eshwarappa was denied the ticket to contest the Assembly election from the Shivamogga seat, which he has represented for the last five terms because of the recent murder of a Bajrang Dal activist and the suicide of a contractor. *—Salar News*

PEOPLE WILL DECIDE MY RELEVANCE, SAYS KUMARASWAMY

BENGALURU, 12 APRIL

JD(S) leader and Mandya Lok Sabha candidate, HD Kumaraswamy, launched a scathing attack on KPCC Chief and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar asserting that the people will decide whether he is politically relevant or irrelevant.

During the campaign for his nephew Prajwal Revanna, at Ramanathapura of Arkalgud in Hassan district on Friday, Kumaraswamy said, "Have I ever asked him to count on me? Kumaraswamy dismissed Shivakumar's assertion of being a 'straight fighter,' reminding him of his political origins under Kotwal Ramachandra. He challenged Shivakumar's arrogance, that the people of Karnataka would decide their leadership preferences.

He condemned attempts by Congress to discredit his candidacy, accusing them of resorting to desperate measures ahead of the elections. *—Salar News*

FIGHT FOR POWER

Dissidence in Cong over seer's Dharwad contest?

BENGALURU, 12 APRIL

Tensions are reportedly brewing within the corridors of power as Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar are at odds over Independent candidate Fakireshwar Dingaleshwar Swamiji of Balehosur Bhavaikyata Peeth contesting from Dharwad. It is said that he is likely to contest as Congress candidate.

While the announcement of Vinod Asooty as Congress candidate in Dharwad constituency stands, sources indicate that Siddaramaiah has rebuffed Shivakumar's attempts to amend this decision and instead provide the party 'B' form to Dingaleshwar Swamiji.

Fakireshwar Dingaleshwara Swami *PHOTO: PTI*

Dingaleshwar, set to challenge Union Minister Pralhad Joshi in Dharwad constituency. Addressing a gathering in Hubli, he rallied for widespread support, vowing to deliver exemplary governance akin to Yogi Adityanath's administration in Uttar Pradesh upon his victory. Shivakumar has speculated that Swamiji's independent bid could work in Congress's favour, given BJP's reluctance to accommodate the influential Lingayat community in the area.

However, Siddaramaiah remains steadfast in his rejection of Shivakumar's proposal. Vinod Asooty, a member of the backward class (Kuruba), has already commenced campaigning and Siddaramaiah deems it impractical to replace him. He contends that if Swamiji proceeds as an independent candidate, it could serve Congress's interests.

Randeep Singh Surjewala's arrival in the City on Thursday evening heralds a crucial consultation with both the Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister. *—Salar News*

At least 300 JD(S) workers join Congress

BENGALURU, 12 APRIL

PHOTO: PTI

Congress orchestrated a midnight operation on Thursday, delivering a significant blow to JD(S) camp.

In a clandestine affair unfolding around 11:30 pm, the KPCC office witnessed a flurry of activity as Congress welcomed Akkur Doddi Shivanna and over 300 JD(S) workers from Channapatna into its fold.

The joining ceremony, presided over by Congress campaign committee President Vinay Kumar Sorake, marked a strategic manoeuvre by Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, who personally oversaw the induction process, sending shockwaves through JD(S) ranks. Shivakumar revealed that the influx of more than 300 JD(S) workers from Channapatna to Congress was merely the tip of the iceberg. He disclosed that over 4,000 workers from Magadi, Ramanagara, and Channapatna had already pledged allegiance to Congress. Shivakumar also hinted at a broader trend, suggesting that many of former Chief Minister HD Kumaraswamy's close associates were gravitating towards Congress, signalling a potential shift in political dynamics. Shivakumar said that the political landscape in is 'evolving'. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: PTI

PM Modi to visit Kerala on 15 April

T'PURAM, 12 APRIL

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will attend two public meetings in Kerala on 15 April as the BJP is aiming to make significant electoral inroads in the southern state. Modi will visit Thiruvananthapuram and Thrissur districts, party sources confirmed. In a move aimed at boosting the support for the saffron party for the 26 April polls, he will attend two public meetings, one in each of the two districts on 15 April. This is Modi's sixth visit to the state. He had last come to Kerala on 19 March when he held a massive roadshow in Palakkad district. His Palakkad roadshow followed his recent participation at a public meeting in Pathanamthitta town on 15 March, where he rallied support for NDA candidates contesting in the southern Kerala constituencies. *—PTI*

Sisodia moves court seeking interim bail

NEW DELHI, 12 APRIL

AAP leader Manish Sisodia, who has been arrested by CBI and ED in connection with the alleged Delhi excise policy scam case, on Friday moved a court seeking interim bail for poll campaigning. Special Judge for CBI and ED, Kaveri Baweja, is likely to take up the application for hearing later in the day. The beneficiaries allegedly diverted "illegal" gains to the accused officials and made false entries in their books of account to evade detection, the probe agencies have alleged. The former deputy chief minister was arrested by CBI on 26 February, 2023, for his alleged role in the "scam". The Enforcement Directorate (ED) arrested Sisodia in a money-laundering case stemming from the CBI FIR on 9 March, 2023. *—PTI*

Officials travel 107kms to ensure elderly men votes

GADCHIROLI, 12 APRIL

Election authorities in Maharashtra's Gadchiroli district travelled on winding and treacherous tracks and through forests for 107 km to enable two elderly men to vote from their homes for the Lok Sabha polls, officials said on Friday. The voters, aged 100 and 86, are from the Gadchiroli-Chimur constituency, which will go to polls in the first phase on 19 April. According to District Information Office in Gadchiroli, Election Commission has given those above 85 years and individuals with more than 40 per cent disability the option of casting their ballots from home in the upcoming general elections. So far, 1,205 home voters have cast their ballots. *—PTI*

Relief to migrants in J&K as ECI removes 'Form M'

JAMMU, 12 APRIL

Kashmiri migrants from Jammu and Udhampur districts of Jammu and Kashmir would no longer be required to fill up 'Form M' to vote in the Lok Sabha polls as the Election Commission has ordered changes to the existing voting scheme for the displaced people, fulfilling a long-standing demand. Earlier, the filing of the form was mandatory for displaced voters from the Valley ahead of every parliamentary and Assembly election in Jammu and Kashmir. Instead, they shall be mapped with the special polling stations falling in the zones they are registered or residing in, the poll panel said. The process of filling out Form M is often complex, requiring specific documentation, proof of migration status and attestation by a gazetted officer, the poll authority noted. *—PTI*

Conspiracy to impose Prez's rule in Delhi: Atishi

She says Delhi people have given clear mandate to Kejri

NEW DELHI, 12 APRIL

Delhi Minister Atishi and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader on Friday alleged that a big political conspiracy is being hatched by BJP-led Central government to impose the President's Rule in the national capital, adding that the party has received several signs regarding the same.

At the press conference in Delhi, Atishi said, "Let me warn BJP that imposing President's rule in Delhi will be illegal, unconstitutional, and against the mandate of the people of Delhi. The people of Delhi have given a clear mandate to Arvind Kejriwal and Aam Aadmi Party."

She further said, "The officers of Delhi govt has stopped attending the meeting. All these things show that there is a conspiracy to topple the government of Kejriwal in Delhi and to implement the President's rule."

The sharp attack came days after the Delhi High Court quashed a petition by Kejriwal challenging his arrest on 21 March.

Speaking to ANI after a press conference, Atishi said, "Kejriwal has been arrested in a fake case and that too without any proof because there is a conspiracy to topple the elected govt of Delhi. When we see a few things from the past, it shows that there has been a well-thought conspiracy going on."

"No officers are being posted in Delhi, no transfer postings within Delhi, and officers have stopped attending the meetings since the elections were announced. For the last week, the LG has been writing baseless letters to MHA and the CM's secretary has also been removed. This all shows the conspiracy that is going on to topple the Delhi government," the AAP leader said.

Earlier on11 April, Bibhav Kumar, Personal Assistant (PA) to Delhi Chief Minister Kejriwal, was terminated from his services. An action in this regard has been taken up by the Directorate of Vigilance (DoV) in connection with a case pending against him for 'obstruction'.

Special Secretary Vigilance YVVJ Rajshekhar passed the order.

The order stated that the charges against Bibhav Kumar are grave in nature, including charges of assault or criminal force to deter a public servant from discharging his duty.

—ANI

Delhi Minister and Aam Aadmi Party leader Atishi addresses a press conference, in New Delhi, on Friday PHOTO: PTI

EXCISE POLICY CASE

Delhi Court remands Kavitha to 3-day CBI custody

NEW DELHI, 12 APRIL

The Rouse Avenue Court of Delhi on Friday sent Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) leader K Kavitha to three days of CBI remand in connection with the excise policy case. CBI had sought five days of custodial remand for her in the case.

The Special Judge, Kaveri Baweja, after hearing both sides in detail, decided to send her to CBI remand till 15 April.

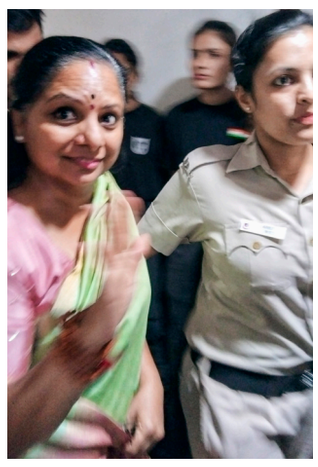
CBI remand application stated that "Kavitha Kalvakuntla was required to be arrested in the instant case to conduct her custodial interrogation for confronting her with the evidence and witnesses to unearth the larger conspiracy hatched among the accused/suspect persons regarding the formulation and implementation of the Excise Policy, as well as to establish the money trail of ill-gotten money generated and to establish the role of other accused/suspect persons, including public servants, as well as to unearth the facts which are in her exclusive knowledge."

One of the companies under Aurbindo Group in July 2021 made a total payment of Rs 14 crore through a bank account transaction, in which Rs 7 crore was paid on the first week of July 2021 and the rest Rs 7 crore was paid in mid-November 2021, said CBI to Court while seeking custodial remand of K Kavitha.

It has been further revealed that in November-December 2021, Kavitha asked Sarath Chandra Reddy to pay Rs 25 crore at the rate of Rs 5 crore per zone as decided earlier for the five retail zones allotted to him, as she had claimed that she herself had paid Rs 100 crore as upfront money on our behalf to Aam Aadmi Party through the accused Vijay Nair for getting favourable provisions in the excise policy and also pursued the same through her associates Arun R Pillai and Abhishek Boinpally.

ED arrested Kavitha on 15 March this year in the case of the alleged liquor policy scam.

—ANI



K Kavitha PHOTO: PTI

- The Special Judge, Kaveri Baweja, after hearing both sides in detail, decided to send her to CBI remand till 15 April. ED arrested Kavitha on 15 March this year in the case of the alleged liquor policy scam

Case filed against Annamalai for prolonged campaigns

COIMBATORE, 12 APRIL

A case has been registered against BJP's Tamil Nadu state President and Lok Sabha candidate from Coimbatore K Annamalai, for allegedly campaigning beyond permitted campaign hours in the Avarampalayam area.

Coimbatore District BJP Secretary Ramesh has also been named in the FIR along with Annamalai.

He was reportedly in the region post 10 pm - the time limit dictated by the election code of conduct for parliamentary elections - after his campaign ran late.

Earlier on 12 April, in a show of support to BJP's Tamil Nadu president and the party's Lok Sabha candidate from Coimbatore, K Annamalai, Telugu Desam Party (TDP) leader Nara Lokesh took part in a joint roadshow with him ahead of the seven-phased general elections. A former partner in BJP-led NDA, TDP, led by Lokesh's father and former Andhra Pradesh chief minister N Chandrababu Naidu, returned to the ruling alliance at the Centre recently.

Confirming the TDP's return to the NDA, BJP National President JP Nadda said the two parties would contest the Lok Sabha elections and the polls to the Andhra assembly, which are to be held in a single phase on 13 May, as partners.

Coming out in praise of BJP's rising poster boy in Tamil Nadu and the South, Lokesh called Annamalai a dynamic and dedicated young leader, who demonstrated a deep understanding of people's issues in the state through his recent padayatra (foot march). Polling for Sabha seats in Tamil Nadu is scheduled to be held on 19 April.

—ANI

K Annamalai PHOTO: PTI

RJD MP Misa Bharti speaks to the media regarding her remarks on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in Patna on Friday PHOTO: ANI

RJD's Misa Bharti clarifies her 'PM in jail' remark

PATNA, 12 APRIL

Facing criticism over her alleged statement that Prime Minister Narendra Modi would end up "in jail" if BJP lost power, RJD leader Misa Bharti on Friday clarified that her remarks were taken out of context.

The eldest daughter of RJD President Lalu Prasad asserted that her comments were focussed on the Supreme Court's ruling on electoral bonds and the need for a thorough investigation into the matter if INDIA bloc, of which RJD is a part, assumed power.

"I never said anything about the PM. The media played a distorted clip instead of telecasting my full comment. It is BJP's agenda", alleged Bharti.

She highlighted the lack of discussion by the BJP on crucial issues like unemployment, inflation, and problems faced by farmers.

Talking to reporters, Bharti said, "BJP does not have any issue. Does PM talk about unemployment, inflation, farmers and other promises made by party leaders earlier."

Bharti is contesting the Lok Sabha polls from Patliputra constituency as an INDIA bloc nominee.

Responding to the backlash from BJP leaders, including Ravi Shankar Prasad, who criticised her alleged statement that had gone viral on Thursday, Bharti reiterated that she never directly mentioned the PM.Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Kumar Sinha called for action from the Election Commission against Bharti, labeling her remarks as threats and predicting a defeat for corrupt RJD leaders in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. *—PTI*

Ex-J&K CM Omar Abdullah to contest polls from Baramulla

SRINAGAR, 12 APRIL

Former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Omar Abdullah will contest elections from Baramulla Lok Sabha constituency, National Conference announced on Friday.

Making the announcement, party President Farooq Abdullah told that influential Shia leader Aga Syed Ruhullah Mehdi will contest from central Kashmir's Srinagar constituency, which has been an NC bastion.

Abdullah challenged BJP to contest Lok Sabha polls in the Kashmir Valley, saying he will quit politics if the national party's candidates do not lose their security deposits.

If BJP was confident of its claims on "development and normalcy", then the party should field its candidates in the three seats in the Kashmir Valley, Abdullah told reporters at a press conference.

After the abrogation of Article 370, and the downgrading and division of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir into two union territories, Omar Abdullah, the NC vice president, had announced he would not contest assembly elections unless J-K's statehood was restored.

Spread over 18 assembly segments, the Baramulla Lok Sabha seat would be one of the keenly watched contests as electoral dynamics in the constituency have changed after delimitation. Considered the party's stronghold, Srinagar seat has been wrested by the NC 12 out of 15 times it went to polls/bypolls since 1967. The Congress, the PDP and an independent have won from the constituency once each.

The party has already fielded senior Gujjar leader Mian Altaf from Anantnag-Rajouri Lok Sabha seat. *—PTI*

Jammu and Kashmir National Conference Chief Farooq Abdullah with party candidate Omar Abdullah in Srinagar on Friday PHOTO: ANI

'WHEN WILL ASSEMBLY POLLS BE HELD IN J&K?'

NEW DELHI, 12 APRIL

With Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressing a rally in Jammu and Kashmir's Udhampur, the Congress accused the BJP-led Centre on Friday of suspending democracy in the Union Territory and asked it when would the Assembly polls be held there.

In a post on X, Congress General Secretary Jairam Ramesh said while the Prime Minister was in Udhampur, in its attempt to retain power in the erstwhile state, the BJP-led government has suspended almost all tiers of democracy and refuses to hold fresh elections.

He said the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir has been under the Centre's direct rule ever since the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) withdrew support to the Mehbooba Mufti-led government in 2018, citing a "deteriorating security situation".

"The people of Jammu and Kashmir have been left without an elected government since then. Four seats in the Rajya Sabha also remain vacant because of the delay in holding assembly polls.

The Centre has often blamed the Election Commission of India for the delay in holding elections but now the Chief Election Commissioner has turned around and blamed the Centre for the delay after 2022's delimitation exercise," the former Union minister said.

He added that eventually, the Supreme Court had to step in and give the Centre a deadline of September 2024 to conduct the Assembly polls in Jammu and Kashmir.

—PTI

Pappu Yadav booked for code violation

PURNEA, 12 APRIL

Former MP Rajesh Ranjan alias Pappu Yadav, who is contesting the Lok Sabha polls as an independent candidate despite joining Congress, was on Friday booked for violating the Model Code of Conduct (MCC).

Yadav, who is trying his luck from the Purnea seat in Bihar, has been named in the FIR lodged at Khajanchi Haat police station of the eponymous district.

According to Khajanchi Haat SHO Kaushlendra Kumar, Yadav has been accused of "threatening" officials who had gone to his residence late on Thursday.

The complaint registered by the Circle Officer (East), Sanjiv Kumar Sharma, said a vehicle involved in Yadav's election campaign had been spotted close to the collectorate. When the driver was asked to show relevant documents, he sped away and parked the vehicle at the residence of Yadav, who came out and allegedly misbehaved with the officials.However, Yadav has alleged that he was being "harassed" at the instance of the ruling JD(U)-BJP combine in Bihar. *—PTI*

THE LONE CONSTITUENCY

Non-tribals hold the key in AP's Lekang

MAHADEVPUR, 12 APRIL

Diganta Moran does not have the right to purchase land in Arunachal Pradesh where he was born and brought up, but he has the right to vote.

Moran is a non-tribal voter from the Lekang assembly seat in eastern Arunachal Pradesh. It is the only assembly seat in the northeastern state where non-tribals hold the key.

"Permanent Residence Certificate (PRC) is quite a contentious issue here, but non-tribal voters here are respected by all candidates who contest from the constituency, and that's the positive side," he said.

In 2019, after BJP's announcement that it would discuss in the assembly the contents of a high-powered committee report that recommended issuing the PRC to these communities led to a cycle of violence.

Of the 20,831 voters in this assembly constituency, an overwhelming majority of around 18,000 are not tribals.

Among the non-tribal living there are Morans, Ahoms, Deoris, Adivasi, Kachari and members of other groups of Assamese origin. In local parlance, the tea tribes are known as Adivasi.

A total of five candidates are in the fray -- Chow Sujana Namchoom of BJP, Likha Soni of NCP, Tana Tamar Tara of Congress, Haren Tali of Arunachal Democratic Party and Independent Moneswar Danggen. Among the issues of the non-tribal communities in the constituency are travelling to state capital Itanagar and getting loans in the absence of legal papers from the state government.

In the 60-member assembly, only the Bordumsa-Diyun is an unreserved constituency. However, no non-tribal candidate has won even from that seat. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Amit Shah holds roadshow in Madurai, attacks Congress

MADURAI/ MORADABAD 12 APRIL

Senior BJP leader Amit Shah held a roadshow in this temple city on Friday in support of the party's Madurai Lok Sabha candidate Raama Srinivasan and other NDA candidates for the 19 April election.

Shah said Tamil Nadu had not witnessed development because of the "corrupt DMK and AIADMK". "BJP is contesting this general election without being in alliance with either the DMK or AIADMK... Now the time has come for the people of Tamil Nadu to stand with Narendra Modi and make him Prime Minister for a third consecutive term," Shah said.

At an election meeting in Moradabad, Shah also slammed Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge for saying that Modi should not be speaking about Kashmir while addressing rallies in other states.

"For 70 years, the Congress pampered Article 370 like an illegitimate (anauras) child in its lap," Shah said, referring to the special status enjoyed by Jammu and Kashmir under the Article.

Modi government eliminated the terrorists by entering their homes, he said.

—PTI

PHOTO: PTI

IAF's airlift op saves Army jawan's hand

NEW DELHI, 12 APRIL

An Indian Army jawan, who severed his hand while operating machinery at a forward unit location in Ladakh, was saved from a successful and timely airlift operation by the Indian Air Force (IAF).The jawan was able to save his 'hand' following a successful surgery carried out by a team of medical personnel in the national capital and is now on the path to recovery." An Indian Army personnel severed his hand while operating a machine, at a unit located in the forward area.

Given a window of six to eight hours for emergency surgery to save his appendage, an IAF C-130J aircraft was launched within an hour to move the Jawan for surgery at the R&R hospital in Delhi," the IAF said. "The injured personnel received medical attention promptly due to the dark night airlift on NVGs from the Ladakh sector by IAF. A dedicated team of medical personnel carried out a successful surgery and the jawan is now on his path to recovery," read the post.—*ANI*

Student dies by suicide at IIT Guwahati

GUWAHATI, 12 APRIL

A student allegedly died by suicide at the Indian Institutte of Technology (IIT)-Guwahati in Assam, police said on Friday. Reportedly, the student was found dead inside his hostel room on Wednesday. "It is with deep regret that IIT Guwahati shares the unfortunate news of the death of a male student on campus on 10 April, 2024," the institute said in a statement. "Our heartfelt condolences go out to the family, and we are providing them with the necessary support during this difficult time," it added.

The institute further informed that the police had initiated an investigation."Our thoughts are with the grieving family," it said.

—*ANI*

Teen ends life by jumping off 24th floor in Ghaziabad

GHAZIABAD, 12 APRIL

A Class 11 student allegedly killed himself by jumping off a high-rise building here, police said on Friday.They said the incident occurred at the ATS Advantage Society in the Indirapuram police station area between 8 and 9pm on Thursday. Assistant Commissioner of Police Swatantra Kumar Singh identified the victim as Nav Khanna,17. He said the boy was last seen with two of his friends on the 24th floor of the building. He was taken to a hospital, where doctors declared him dead, police said, adding that a suicide note was found in his pocket. According to officials, the two friends of the deceased who were with him told police that they were taking pictures at the time of the incident.—*PTI*

Manipur: SC junks activist's plea on quashing of FIRs

NEW DELHI, 12 APRIL

The Supreme Court has refused to entertain a plea moved by a transgender activist seeking directions to quash the FIRs registered against her for fasting until death to protest against ethnic clashes in Manipur. A three-judge bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud, however, granted liberty to the activist, Malem Thongam, to approach the Manipur High Court for the redressal of her grievances.Thongam began her hunger strike in the Delhi University on 22 February. She left Delhi for Manipur on 27 February, where she continued her hunger strike at Imphal's Kangla western gate. Police arrested Thongam on 2 March on charges of promoting enmity between groups.—*PTI*

CIC raps EC for not replying to RTI query on EVMs

CIC has also asked EC to submit a written explanation

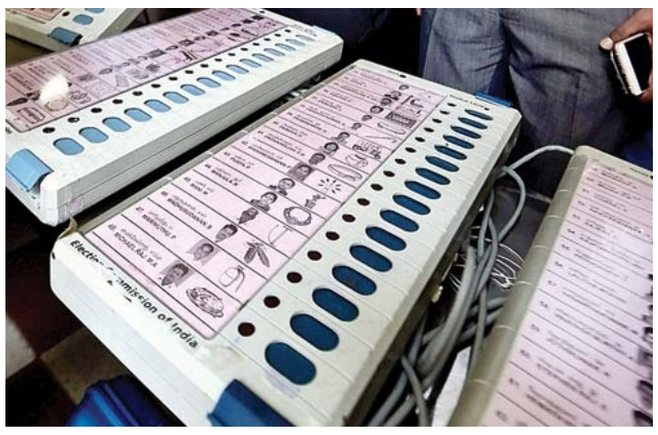
NEW DELHI, 12 APRIL

The Central Information Commission (CIC) has expressed "severe displeasure" over the Election Commission (EC) not furnishing a reply to an RTI plea that had asked the poll panel about the action taken on a "representation" given to it by eminent citizens, raising questions on the credibility of EVMs and VVPAT machines during elections.

Terming it a "gross violation" of the law, the CIC has also directed the EC to submit a written explanation.

Former Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer MG Devasahayam, who was one of the signatories to the representation on the credibility of electronic voting machines (EVMs), voter-verifiable paper audit trail (VVPAT) and the vote-counting process, had filed an application with the poll panel under the Right to Information (RTI) Act, seeking details of the action taken on it.

The representation was sent to the EC on 2 May, 2022.



An RTI was filed questioning the credibility of electronic voting machines (EVM) and voter-verifiable paper audit trail (VVPAT) PHOTO: PTI

Through the RTI application filed on 22 November, 2022, Devasahayam wanted to know about the people and public authorities to whom the representation was forwarded, details of any meetings held on the issue and all relevant file notings.

The EC did not give any response to him within the mandatory 30-day period and Devasahayam's first appeal to senior officials was also not heard.

He approached the CIC in the second appeal, citing the lack of response from the poll panel.

When quizzed by Chief Information Commissioner Heeralal Samariya, the central public information officer of the EC failed to give a satisfactory reply on why no response was furnished to Devasahayam.

- The EC did not give any response to him within the mandatory 30-day period and Devasahayam's first appeal to senior officials was also not heard

He said if others are also responsible for the omission, then the CPIO shall serve a copy of the order on them and ensure that the written submissions of such people are sent to the CIC.

Samariya also directed the EC to provide a point-wise response to the RTI application within 30 days.

Noted technical professionals and academicians, including professors from Indian institutes of technology (IITs) and Indian institutes of management (IIMs), and former civil servants, including retired IAS, IPS and IFS officers, had written to the EC posing serious questions on the credibility of EVMs and VVPAT machines. —*PTI*

According to Indian Meteorological Department (IMD), rainfall recorded from 10 April to 11 April in Thoothukudi was 2.9 mm PHOTO: ANI

Rain lashes parts of TN; storms in AP

THOOTHUKUDI, 12 APRIL

Heavy rainfall lashed several parts of Tamil Nadu's Thoothukudi on Friday causing waterlogging in some areas, making it difficult for commuters.

According to the official site of Indian Meteorological Department (IMD), rainfall recorded from 8.30am on 10 April to 8.30am on 11 April in Thoothukudi was 2.9 mm.

Last week, from 4 April to 10 April, the district of Thoothukudi received 13.6 mm of rainfall. And till now, from 1 April to 11 April, the district has received 19.2 mm of rainfall.

Meanwhile, IMD in its bulletin released on 11 April, mentioned that maximum temperatures in Tamil Nadu were generally above normal to appreciably above normal by 2°C to 4°C over a few pockets in the plains of the north interior and south Tamil Nadu.

The highest maximum temperature was recorded in Tirupattur at 41.8°C, followed by Salem at 40.1°C. The plains of the rest of interior Tamil Nadu recorded 37°C to 40°C. The coastal areas of Tamil Nadu recorded 33°C to 37°C, and the hilly areas recorded 21°C to 31°C.

Thundershowers likely in parts of AP for next two days

India Meteorological Department (IMD) predicted thunderstorms accompanied by lightning in parts of Andhra Pradesh for two days from Friday. It has forecast thunderstorms accompanied by lightning at isolated places in North Coastal Andhra Pradesh (NCAP), Yanam and Rayalaseema. Besides rainfall, hot, humid and discomforting weather is expected at isolated places across the state, IMD said in a release on Friday. Further, it observed that lower tropospheric south-easterly winds are prevailing over Andhra Pradesh and Yanam.

—*ANI/ PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

- IMD in its bulletin released on 11 April, mentioned that maximum temperatures in Tamil Nadu were generally above normal to appreciably above normal by 2°C to 4°C over a few pockets in the plains of the north interior and south Tamil Nadu

₹400cr fraud case: Aide of Cox & Kings owner nabbed

MUMBAI, 12 APRIL

Mumbai police's Economic Offences Wing (EOW) has arrested a close aide of the owner of tour and travel company Cox & Kings in connection with a Rs 400-crore fraud case involving Yes Bank, officials said on Friday.

Ajit Menon, 67, a British national, was apprehended by a team of Mumbai police at Cochin airport in Kerala after he arrived from London on Tuesday, an official said.

Menon was brought to Mumbai on Thursday morning and produced in a court, which remanded him in police custody till 15 April.

According to the official, Menon was a close aide of Ajay Peter Kerkar, the owner of Cox and Kings.

Menon came on the EOW radar during the agency's probe into the Rs 400-crore Yes Bank fraud case, which involved alleged diversion of money after availing a loan from the bank, the official said.The money disbursed by Yes Bank was not used for the purpose for which they had obtained the loan, the official said.Cox and Kings Financial Services Limited was into providing foreign exchange business, holiday financing, student loans and other non-banking financial services.EOW had named company owner Kerkar, his wife, Menon and other individuals in the FIR, he said. —*PTI*

- Ajit Menon, 67, a British national, was apprehended by a team of Mumbai police at Cochin airport in Kerala after he arrived from London

BIJU FESTIVAL

Chakma community members perform rituals at Deo River during Biju festival at Pencharthal, in Tripura, on Friday. Biju is celebrated for three days, marking the dawn of New Year PHOTO: PTI

IN KERALA

Train hits jumbo, pilot nabbed

PALAKKAD, 12 APRIL

Two days after a female elephant, suspected to have been hit by a train, was found injured in an area adjacent to the forest in Palakkad, Forest department officials on Friday registered a case against an unidentified loco pilot in connection with the incident.

As the elephant is currently unable to stand due to suspected injuries to its hind legs, Forest officials sprang into action providing medical assistance and food.

However, the officials said the prognosis was not good.

Forest Veterinary Officer from Thrissur Division, David Abraham told media that the jumbo has been lying down since Thursday morning and all efforts to raise the elephant have failed.

"There are no external injuries but it seems like there are internal injuries. The elephant reached this spot after the suspected accident on Wednesday. but since yesterday morning it is lying down and unable to stand up. As of now the prognosis is not good," Abraham said.

He also said all necessary facilities from the nearby elephant rehabilitation centre have been made available at the location and veterinary experts have examined the animal.

A female elephant, suspected to have been hit by a train, was found injured in an area adjacent to the forest in Palakkad PHOTO: PTI

The elephant is currently lying down in a forest region near Kottekkad Railway station in Palakkad district.

Wild elephant rescued from well in Kerala

After several hours of effort on Friday, the forest department and the police jointly rescued a wild elephant that had fallen into a well inside a private rubber plantation near the forested areas of Kothamangalam in Ernakulam district.

The forest department officials and the local police dug a path out of the well, which had no walls, using an excavator and rescued the wild tusker that fell into the well in the morning.

Earlier local residents of the area protested against the forest officials, stating that the animal The local people demanded that the elephant be tranquilised and shifted to another part of the forest rather than letting it loose in the same region. However, the police and forest officials dug up a path from the well after cordoning off the area, and let the animal go back into the woods. —*PTI*

SC extends stay on ex-IPS' sentence on Dhoni's plea

NEW DELHI, 12 APRIL

The Supreme Court has extended the interim stay on the 15-day simple imprisonment handed to retired IPS officer G Sampath Kumar by the Madras High Court in a contempt of court case filed by former cricketer Mahendra Singh Dhoni.

A bench of Justices AS Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan has listed the matter for hearing on 3 May.

"Interim order shall continue till further orders," the bench said on Thursday.

The High Court had, on 15 December last year, found Kumar guilty of committing criminal contempt and sentenced him to simple imprisonment for 15 days.

In his contempt petition, Dhoni had sought punishment for Kumar for his remarks against the judiciary in a written statement filed in response to a Rs 100-crore defamation suit.

Dhoni had moved the court in 2014 against the former police officer for naming him in the Indian Premier League (IPL) betting scam.

In its order, the high court had said Kumar had consciously made an attempt to scandalise and lower the authority of this court and the Supreme Court. It was established that an affidavit or pleading presented by a party before a court was an act of publication.

- The High Court had, on 15 December last year, found Kumar guilty of committing criminal contempt and sentenced him to simple imprisonment for 15 days

Kumar, by his specific words, had launched an indecent attack on the judiciary, with an intention to scandalise and undermine the dignity and majesty of this court as well as the apex court, the High Court had said.

It had said when a general statement was made against the court for granting an interim order, describing the order as an abuse of the process of law, it was not a fair comment. Similarly, accusing the Supreme Court that it failed to focus on the "rule of law" cannot be accepted as a fair expression of grievance of a party to the dispute, the bench had added.

The High Court had said Kumar was a responsible police officer who had the occasion to investigate a crime. —*PTI*

CBI STARTS EMAIL FOR VICTIMS OF SANDESHKHALI

KOLKATA, 12 APRIL

CBI announced a dedicated email address for registration of complaints regarding crimes against women and land grabbing in Sandeshkhali in West Bengal.

The email address, sandeshkhali@cbi.gov.in, will serve as a platform for the people of Sandeshkhali in North 24 Parganas district to lodge their complaints, officials said.

"In pursuance to the order passed by the division bench of Calcutta High Court on 10 April, 2024, CBI has created a dedicated email in which complaints of persons of Sandeshkhali regarding crimes against women and forcible grabbing of land may be lodged," CBI said in a statement on Thursday.

The district magistrate has been urged to publicise the email ID extensively within the locality and issue a public notice in vernacular newspapers with wide circulation, it added. The High Court ordered a court-monitored CBI investigation into allegations of crimes against women and land grabbing in Sandeshkhali, saying an "impartial inquiry" was required in the interest of justice and fair play. —*PTI*

CHOKING PLANET

India among 12 nations responsible for 60% of plastic waste

NEW DELHI, 8 APRIL

India is among the twelve countries responsible for 60 percent of the planet's mismanaged plastic waste though the fast-developing South Asian nation's per capita plastic waste production is among the lowest in the world, according to a new report.

The Plastic Overshoot Day report by Swiss non-profit EA Earth Action also said global plastic waste generation has risen by 7.11 per cent since 2021. The world is estimated to have generated 220 million tons of plastic waste this year, 70 million tons of which will end up polluting the environment.

The report comes ahead of the fourth meeting of the United Nations' Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) in Ottawa, Canada, as the world leaders attempt to develop a legally binding instrument to end plastic pollution.

"Twelve countries are responsible for 60 per cent of the world's mismanaged plastic waste: China, India, Russia, Brazil, Mexico, Vietnam, Iran, Indonesia, Egypt, Pakistan, the United States and Turkey," it said.Though the report classifies India as a "low-waste-producing" polluter due to its low per capita plastic waste production (8 kg per capita per year), it said the country's expected mismanaged waste in 2024 will be 7.4 million tons, which is "very high".Still, India's mismanaged plastic waste will be less than one-fifth of China and one-third of the US.The report also claimed India is estimated to release an average of 3,91,879 tons of microplastics into the environment and 31,483 tons of chemical additives into waterways.People living in Belgium are the top generators of plastic waste, with a yearly waste production of 147.7 kg per person. This is 16 times higher than in India, it said.The report said that by April 2024, almost half of the world's population will be living in areas where plastic waste has already exceeded the capacity to manage it. On September 5, it said, that the plastic waste produced worldwide will surpass the planet's waste management systems and will be called "Plastic Overshoot Day". —*PTI*

The world is estimated to have generated 220 million tonnes of plastic waste this year PHOTO: PIXABAY

AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

A scuba diver demonstrates voting on EVM, sixty feet under water, during Election Commission's unique voter awareness campaign, in Neelankarai district, Chennai ***PHOTO: PTI***

What is at stake in the world's biggest poll?

LOK SABHA ELECTION 2024

India's 2024 general election - to be held over six weeks between 19 April and 1 June - will be the biggest the world has ever seen.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is hoping to win a third successive term, but opposition parties say Indians face the loss of many freedoms if he stays in power.

India is the world's most populous country, with 1.4 billion inhabitants ***PHOTO: PTI***

Which parties are standing against Narendra Modi's BJP?

Recent opinion polls suggest BJP and its allies will win the election for the Lok Sabha - the lower chamber of India's parliament - for a third time running.

The Lok Sabha chooses the Prime Minister, who in turns chooses government ministers.

In the 2019 election BJP won 303 seats, and the coalition of parties it is in, National Democratic Alliance, took 352 seats overall.

The main challenge in 2024 comes from a coalition of political parties headed by the Indian National Congress, the biggest Opposition party.

More than two dozen parties have joined it to form Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance ("India" for short).

Key politicians in this group include Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge, as well as siblings Rahul and Priyanka Gandhi, whose father was the former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi.

Their mother, Sonia Gandhi, is a powerful Opposition leader but is not expected to campaign as hard as she did in 2019.

Delhi's governing Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) is part of the coalition, along with several important regional parties.

Three AAP leaders have been recently arrested, accused of corruption. The party accuses Mr Modi and the BJP of conducting a political vendetta against it, which the BJP denies.

- Recent opinion polls suggest BJP and its allies will win the election for the Lok Sabha - the lower chamber of India's parliament - for a third time running.The Lok Sabha chooses the Prime Minister, who in turns chooses government ministers.In the 2019 election BJP won 303 seats, and the coalition of parties it is in, National Democratic Alliance, took 352 seats overall.

What are the key issues and why does the India general election matter?

Modi can claim global standing has risen thanks to its growing economy and closer relations with the US, which wants India to be its ally against China.

He has recently introduced generous welfare schemes, such as providing free grain to 800 million of India's poorest, and a monthly stipend of 1,250 rupees ($16; £12) to women from low-income families. In its manifesto Congress argues that unemployment remains high, especially for young people.

And it promises increased welfare payments for women, three million extra government jobs and more apprenticeships for college leavers.

It also promises that it will stop "slide into autocracy".

Minority groups say that they often face discrimination and attacks, and have been forced to live as "second-class" citizens under Modi's rule - an allegation BJP denies.

The campaign group for international civil liberties, Freedom House, says that journalists and others who question BJP government have increasingly been harassed. It classifies India as only "partly free".

What are the dates of the polling days, and why does voting take so long?

Voting is taking place in different parts of India on seven polling days: 19 April, 26 April, 7 May, 13 May, 20 May, 25 May and 1 June.

The results will be announced on 4 June.

Voting is staggered to enable security staff to guard polling stations across the country.

Millions of electronic voting machines will be used, which let people choose between candidates or pick "none of the above".

Who can vote in elections for the Lok Sabha?

India is the world's most populous country, with 1.4 billion inhabitants, and 969 million of them can vote in this year's election - roughly one in eight of the global population.

Voters must be Indian citizens, 18 years of age or older and be on the electoral register. They also need valid voter ID cards.

The 13.4 million Indian citizens who live abroad can also vote, but must register and return to India to do so.

There are 543 elected MPs in the Lok Sabha, and an individual party or coalition needs at least 272 seats to form a majority to govern.

Members of the Lok Sabha are elected for a five-year term to represent a single constituency, the winner being the candidate with the most votes.

There are 131 seats reserved for MPs from so-called "scheduled castes" and "scheduled tribes". These are groups officially recognised as disadvantaged, and make up about a quarter of India's population.

India is 1.3 million sq miles (3.3 million sq km) in area, and electoral rules say there must be a polling booth close to every human habitation.

The 2019 elections had a polling booth in a remote forest area of the Gir National Park in Gujarat for the one man living there.

In the 2024 elections, officials will trek 24 miles (39km) to a village in Arunachal Pradesh state in north-east India, to collect the vote of a single female voter.

—BBC News

LETTERS write to us at salar@salar.news

SALAR سالار

India ranks number 10 in cybercrime, study finds

India ranked number 10 in cybercrime, with frauds involving people to make advance fee payment being the most common type, according to a new research that surveyed cybercrime experts around the world.

An international team of researchers has compiled the 'World Cybercrime Index' that ranks roughly 100 countries and identifies key hotspots according to various categories of cybercrime, including ransomware, credit card theft and scams.

India was found to "specialise" in scams ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

- India ranked number 10 in cybercrime, with frauds involving people to make advance fee payment being the most common type, according to a new research that surveyed cybercrime experts around the world.

Russia topped the list, and was followed by Ukraine, China, the US, Nigeria and Romania. North Korea was at the seventh position, while the UK and Brazil were at the eighth and ninth positions, respectively, according to the research published in the journal PLoS ONE.

Through the survey, the researchers asked the experts to consider major types of crime in the virtual world and nominate countries that they thought contributed significantly to each of them.

The major categories that the researchers identified were - technical products and services such as malware and compromising systems; attacks and extortion including ransomware; data and identity theft including hacking, compromising accounts and credit cards; scams such as advance fee fraud; and cashing out or money laundering involving illegitimate virtual currency.

Invites to respond to the survey were sent out from March to October 2021. The team received 92 complete survey responses.

The top six countries appeared among the top ten countries under each cybercrime category, the researchers found. They further found that countries that are cybercrime hubs "specialise" in particular categories.

"Russia and Ukraine are highly technical cybercrime hubs, whereas Nigerian cybercriminals are engaged in less technical forms of cybercrime," the authors wrote in the study.

Among the top ranking countries, while some may "specialise" in cybercrime types with middling technical complexity - such as those involved in data and identity theft - others may "specialise" in both high-tech and low-tech crimes, they said.

India was found to "specialise" in scams. Further, while Romania and the US were found to "specialise" in both high-tech and low-tech crimes, India was found to be a "balanced hub", "specialising" in mid-tech crimes.

"In short, each country has a distinct profile, indicating a unique local dimension," the authors wrote.

"We now have a deeper understanding of the geography of cybercrime, and how different countries specialise in different types of cybercrime," said study co-author Miranda Bruce from the University of Oxford, UK.

The "intensive" three-year-long research "will help remove the veil of anonymity around cybercriminal offenders, and we hope that it will aid the fight against the growing threat of profit-driven cybercrime," said Bruce.

The experts contacted by the researchers were professionals engaged in cybercrime intelligence, investigation and attribution for at least five years, were "not actively involved in tracking offenders" and had an "excellent" reputation among peers.

—PTI

Russia topped the list, followed by Ukraine, China, the US, Nigeria and Romania ***PHOTO: UNSPLASH***

How government is trying to keep food prices in check ahead of elections?

As India approaches the first phase of the upcoming general elections, the prices of essential food items are at the centre stage. In anticipation of the polls, the government has taken measures to keep food prices low for consumers across the nation. At least five essential commodities are subject to various prohibitions, restrictions, mandatory disclosure provisions, or other measures ahead of the election season.

The first phase of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections is scheduled to begin on 19 April, 2024.

Food inflation increased to 8.66 per cent in February from the previous month's 8.3 per cent, whereas India's retail inflation eased marginally to 5.09 per cent compared to 5.10 per cent in January.

However, Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations' food price index — a measure of the monthly change in international prices of a basket of food commodities — shows an ease in global prices, thus giving hope of a softening of food inflation in the near future.

The index stood at 118.3 points in March 2024, marking a 7.7 per cent decline from a year ago. The index had fallen for seven consecutive months, from July 2023 until February 2024. It increased in March by 1.3 points (1.1 per cent) from its February level, driven by rises in the price indices for vegetable oils, dairy products and meat.

However, there was a decrease in the prices of sugar and cereals. The FAO Cereal Price Index averaged 110.8 points in March, down 3.0 points (2.6 per cent) from February and 27.7 points (20 per cent) below its March 2023 value.

Onion

The contentious issue of onion prices is once again at the forefront.

On 22 March, 2024, the government extended its ban on onion exports indefinitely, just days before the ban was set to expire on March 31.

The export ban imposed on 8 December, 2023 came in response to a domestic supply crunch, aimed at ensuring the availability of the staple vegetable to domestic consumers at affordable prices. Initially scheduled to continue until 31 March, onion farmers and traders were hopeful that the ban would be lifted after this date. However, the decision to extend the ban came as a surprise to both groups.

Farmers in Maharashtra, the largest producing state, expressed that market conditions were conducive to lifting the ban. With the Rabi harvest expected to start arriving in the mandis soon, they argued that there was no immediate need for extending the ban again.

This indicates that there will be a good quantity of vegetables in the market. Historically, onions have been a critical commodity in Indian politics, with fluctuations in prices often influencing voter sentiment.

Prices of essential food items are at the centre stage ***PHOTO: PTI***

However, the extension of the ban on onion exports has led to farmers voicing their frustration over mounting losses.

The extension of the ban has resulted in losses for onion farmers, with many unable to even cover the production costs.

Since December, following the export ban, prices have been declining. In Lasalgaon, Asia's largest onion market, farmers are receiving anywhere between Rs 1,000 and Rs 1,300 per quintal.

Wheat

The ban on wheat exports, in place since May 2022, persists. On 29 March, 2024, the government mandated that all traders, retailers and processors across states and union territories declare their wheat stock position starting from 1 April, with subsequent declarations required every Friday until further notice.

This, the government said, has been done to prevent hoarding and price spikes.

The decision came against the backdrop of central wheat stocks being at their lowest in 16 years. However, the government estimates a record 112 million metric tonnes (MT) of wheat output for the 2024-25 marketing season. Moreover, there is an expected rise in production in key states like Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh.

Sugar

India, the world's second-largest sugar exporter, placed sugar in a restricted category until 31 October, 2022, when there were concerns about a shortage of sugar. The restriction was placed to ensure sufficient availability of sugar for domestic consumption at a reasonable price. However, the ban, initially extended on 31 October, 2023, has been further prolonged indefinitely.

The sugarcane crushing season is nearly complete and sugar production is expected to surpass the 30 million tonnes mark. According to Indian Sugar and Bio-energy Manufacturers Association, the country's sugar production may reach 34 million tonness in 2023-24, compared to a forecast of 33.05 million in January.

The domestic demand is around 27.5 million tonnes.

Experts believe that the export ban is unlikely to be lifted, at least until the elections. Additionally, much of the surplus produced is expected to be diverted for ethanol production.

Rice

In July 2023, India banned the export of non-basmati white rice to prioritise domestic consumers amid depleting public stock in the central pool and concerns about a potential dip in rice production in the Kharif season 2023-24.

In January 2024, Union Minister for Commerce Piyush Goyal stated the government was not considering any proposal to lift export curbs on rice, wheat and sugar. However, it is aiding friendly nations such as Indonesia, Senegal, Gambia, Bhutan and more recently Maldives, among others, with their food security needs by permitting exports to these countries.

Pulses

On 10 April, the government mandated that pulses importers, millers, stockists, traders and processors disclose their stocks of all pulses from 15 April onwards to prevent hoarding, as it suspects a large quantity of imported legumes are stored in customs warehouses.

It instructed all states and union territories to enforce weekly stock disclosure of pulses by all stockholding entities and to verify the stocks declared by them.

Apart from the five major pulses, namely, tur (pigeon peas), urad (black gram), chana (Bengal gram), masoor (lentils) and moong (green gram), states and Union territories have been asked to monitor the stock position regarding imported yellow peas, which are used in place of chana. Duty-free import of yellow peas has been permitted since 8 December, 2023, until 30 June, 2024, to enhance the overall availability of pulses.

—Downtoearth

US restricts travel for diplomats in Israel

WASHNGTON, 12 APRIL

The United States has restricted travel for its embassy personnel in Israel amid fears of an attack by Iran. The US embassy said staff had been told not to travel outside the greater Jerusalem, Tel Aviv or Beersheba areas "out of an abundance of caution". Iran has vowed to retaliate, blaming Israel for a strike on its consulate in Syria 11 days ago, killing 13 people. UK Foreign Secretary Lord Cameron has phoned his Iranian counterpart to urge against further escalation. AIsrael has not claimed responsibility for the consulate attack but is widely considered to have been behind it. Iran backs Hamas, the armed Palestinian group fighting Israel in Gaza, as well as various proxy groups throughout the region, including some - such as Hezbollah in Lebanon - that frequently carry out strikes against Israelis. ***—BBC News***

PHOTO: PTI

New chapter to begin in US-India relations: Lloyd

WASHINGTON, 12 APRIL

US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin has told lawmakers that by bolstering the Indian military's capabilities, the two nations can work together to uphold a more stable balance of power across the wider Indo-Pacific region. He also told members of the Senate Armed Services Committee during a Congressional hearing this week on the annual budget of the Department of Defence that the militaries of the US and India are accelerating operational activities to boost maritime security in the Indian Ocean. "By bolstering the Indian military's capabilities, we can work together to uphold a more stable balance of power across the wider Indo-Pacific," Austin said and added that "with this budget request, we are beginning a new chapter in US-India relations under our Major Defence Partnership". ***—PTI***

Death toll in Pakistan truck crash rises to 18

BALOCHISTAN, 12 APRIL

The death toll in the mishap in which a truck carrying pilgrims travelling to Shah Noorani shrine in Khuzdar, Balochistan crashed into a ravine has risen to 18, while over 50 people sustained injuries in the incident, Geo News reported. Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah, who visited the Civil Hospital's Trauma Centre to extend his support to the injured, confirmed the grim toll, stating that 17 lives were initially lost, with 52 injured passengers rushed to the hospital, 40 of whom were later discharged. "Five injured in the Trauma Centre are on ventilators. As long as the injured are on the vent, their health will be critical," he remarked, according to Geo News. Expressing deep sorrow, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif directed efforts to ensure the injured receive necessary medical attention promptly. ***—ANI***

Poverty-stricken man in Pak kills wife, 7 children

MUZAFFARGARH, 12 APRIL

Pushed to the edge by poverty, a man in Alipur Tehsil in Pakistan's Muzaffargarh District murdered his wife and seven children, ARY News reported. Sajjad Khokhar committed the heinous crime in Alipur, the authorities were cited as saying in the report published on Thursday. The police spokesperson stated that the victims of this tragedy were identified as 40-year-old Kausar, along with her children. In a separate incident, a man in Karachi resorted to poisoning his wife and children in Karachi's Sujrani Town Sector-10. ***—ANI***

Ramadan: 19 killed, 55 injured in Pak

Police have engaged in 425 shootouts this year

KARACHI, 12 APRIL

During Ramzan 2024, Karachi witnessed a surge in crime, with 19 fatalities and 55 injuries resulting from resistance to robberies, as reported by ARY News.

A police official disclosed that armed robbers were responsible for the deaths of 19 citizens in Karachi during robbery attempts.

This year, the city has seen a notable escalation in robbery-related fatalities, totalling 56, with over 200 individuals injured thus far. In comparison, the corresponding period last year saw 25 fatalities and 110 injuries due to resistance against robberies. In 2023, the figures were alarmingly higher, with 108 deaths and 469 injuries resulting from similar circumstances.

Karachi police have engaged in 425 shootouts with robbers this year, resulting in 55 dacoits being neutralized and 439 sustaining injuries. According to a report by the Citizens-Police Liaison Committee (CPLC), the first three months of 2024 saw 22,627 reported crimes, including 59 fatalities and over 700 injuries stemming from robbery resistance. Additionally, 373 cars, 15,968 motorbikes, and 6,102 mobile phones were reported stolen or snatched during this period. The CPLC report also documented 25 extortion incidents and five cases of kidnapping for ransom in Karachi, ARY News reported.

The CPLC report also documented 25 extortion incidents and five cases of kidnapping for ransom in Karachi, ARY reported ***PHOTO: X/@ARGUSNEWS***

Karachi's Police Chief, Additional Inspector General Imran Yaqoob, attributed a significant portion of the city's crime to outsiders, including individuals from interior Sindh and Balochistan. Yaqoob highlighted that approximately 4,00,000 "professional" beggars and criminal elements flock to Karachi during Ramzan and Eid-ul-Fitr.

He also said that the city's daily crime rate of 166 cases per day, while concerning, was comparatively lower than that of other major cities in Pakistan.

Addressing Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah and other stakeholders during a meeting on April 8, Yaqoob reiterated that Karachi's crime rate was relatively modest, averaging less than one case per police station, despite the challenges posed by external criminal elements, ARY News reported. *—ANI*

THOUSANDS WITHOUT POWER

Russian airstrikes destroy Kyiv's largest power plant

KYIV, 12 APRIL

A massive missile and drone attack destroyed one of Ukraine's largest power plants and damaged others, officials said Thursday, part of a renewed Russian campaign targeting energy infrastructure.

The Trypilska plant, which was the biggest energy supplier for the Kyiv, Cherkasy and Zhytomyr regions, was struck numerous times, destroying the transformer, turbines and generators and leaving the plant ablaze. As the first drone approached, workers hid in a shelter, saving their lives, said Andrii Gota, chairman of the supervisory board of the state company that runs the plant, Centrenergo.

They watched the plant burn, surrounded by dense smoke and engulfed in flames. "It's terrifying," said Gota. Hours later, rescuers were still dismantling the rubble. Speaking in Moscow, Russian President Vladimir Putin cast the attacks on Ukrainian energy facilities as a response to Ukrainian strikes that targeted Russian oil refineries. The Trypilska plant supplied electricity to 3 million customers — but none lost power because the grid was able to compensate since demands are low at this time of year. Still, the consequences of the strikes could be felt in the coming months, as air conditioning use ramps up with summer. At least 10 other strikes overnight damaged energy infrastructure in Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city. Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said more than 2,00,000 people in the region, which has been struck repeatedly, were without power. *—AP*

Trypilska plant supplied electricity to 3M customers ***PHOTO: X/@2DIALOGUE***

Navalny's memoir 'Patriot' set for release in October

MOSCOW, 12 APRIL

Russian Opposition leader Alexey Navalny's memoir is set to be published posthumously this autumn, his widow Yulia Navalnaya announced on Thursday. Entitled "Patriot," the book is set for release on October 22 in multiple languages, including Russian. Navalnaya disclosed that her husband commenced crafting his autobiography in 2020, shortly after surviving poisoning with the Soviet-era nerve agent Novichok. Kira Yarmysh, Navalny's spokesperson, shared insights on the collaborative effort involved in bringing the memoir to fruition. She recounted how Navalny, during his medical treatment in Germany following the poisoning, enlisted her aid for the project, according to CNN. While in Germany, Navalny dictated portions of the book to Yarmysh, later completing it while incarcerated upon his return to Russia. Penguin Random House, set to publish the memoir in the United Kingdom, has hailed it as "a rousing call to continue the work for which Navalny sacrificed his life." *—ANI*

A number of US and South Korean guided missile destroyers and a Japanese warship joined the 10-12 April drill***PHOTO: X/@SEGAMIHCFUND***

US, Japan & South Korea hold drills in disputed sea

NEW YORK, 12 APRIL

- The dueling military and diplomatic maneuvers are meant to strengthen the partners' solidarity in the face of China's aggressive military actions in the region

A US carrier strike group led by the USS Theodore Roosevelt has held a three-day joint exercise with its allies Japan and South Korea as US President Joe Biden met for talks with leaders from Japan and the Philippines at the White House.

The dueling military and diplomatic maneuvers are meant to strengthen the partners' solidarity in the face of China's aggressive military actions in the region.

A number of US and South Korean guided missile destroyers and a Japanese warship joined the 10-12 April drill in the disputed East China Sea, where worries about China territorial claims are rising. The Associated Press was one of several news organizations allowed a front-row look at the drills.

Rear Adm Christopher Alexander, commander of Carrier Strike Group Nine, said the three nations conducted undersea warfare exercises, maritime interdiction operations, search and rescue drills and work focused on communication and data sharing.

He told journalists Thursday on the Roosevelt that these drills would help improve communication among the United States and its allies and "better prepare us for a crisis in the region."

F/A-18E Super Hornet combat jets took off from the carrier's flight deck, which also had anti-submarine MH-60R Seahawk helicopters. Journalists were flown more than an hour from Kadena Air Base, the hub of US Pacific air power.

"It is a busy time; there is a lot going on in the world," Alexander said. "The significance of this exercise is we have three like-minded countries, three like-minded navies that believe in peace, security and stability in the western Pacific."

This week's huge parliamentary election defeat of the governing party of South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol, who has sought better relations with Japan, could constrain his Japan-friendly efforts, but experts believe ties will remain stable. *—AP*

Junta bans media from reporting on political activities

BAMAKO, 12 APRIL

Mali's ruling junta on Thursday banned the media from reporting on activities of political parties and associations, a day after suspending all political activities in the country until further notice.

The order, issued by Mali's high authority for communication, was distributed on social media. The notice said it applied to all forms of the media, including television, radio, online and print newspapers.

Mali has experienced two coups since 2020, leading a wave of political instability that has swept across West and Central Africa in recent years. Along with its political troubles, the country is also in the grip of a worsening insurgency by militants linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State group.

The scope of the ban — or how it would be applied in practice — was not immediately clear. It was also not known if journalists would still be allowed to report on issues such as the economy, which are closely tied to politics and who would monitor their work.

Mali's national commission for human rights also expressed regret and profound concern over the decision in a statement published late Thursday. It warned the junta the decision could prove harmful. "Instead of calming the social climate, these restrictions on fundamental rights and freedoms could potentially stir up trouble and tension, which the country does not need," it said.

The clampdown on the media followed a similar action on Wednesday, when the junta ordered the suspension of all activities by political parties until further notice, citing a a need to preserve public order. *—AP*

Thousands of Russian soldiers are fleeing war in Ukraine

ASTANA, 12 APRIL

If the choice was death or a bullet to the leg, Yevgeny would take the bullet.

A decorated hero of Russia's war in Ukraine, Yevgeny told his friend and fellow soldier to please aim carefully and avoid bone. The tourniquets were ready. The pain that followed was the price Yevgeny paid for a new chance at life. Like thousands of other Russian soldiers, he deserted.

"I joke that I gave birth to myself," he said, declining to give his full name for fear of retribution. "When a woman gives birth to a child, she experiences very intense pain and gives new life. I gave myself life after going through very intense pain."

Yevgeny made it out of the trenches. But the new life he found is not what he had hoped for. Associated Press spoke with five officers and one soldier who deserted the Russian military. All have criminal cases against them in Russia, where they face 10 years or more in prison.

Rusians army said that they have no sapce to go ***PHOTO: PTI***

Each is waiting for a welcome from the West that has never arrived. Instead, all but one live in hiding. For Western nations grappling with Russia's vast and growing diaspora, Russian soldiers present particular concern: Are they spies? War criminals? Or heroes?

"I did the right thing," said another deserter who goes by the nickname Sparrow, who is living in hiding in Kazakhstan while he waits for his asylum applications to be processed.

Asylum claims from Russian citizens have surged since the full-scale invasion, but few are winning protection. Policymakers remain divided over whether to consider Russians in exile as potential assets or risks to national security. *—AP*

US adopts resolution against Hinduphobia

WASHINGTON, 12 APRIL

Celebrating the contributions of Hindus and Hinduism to the US, a prominent Indian-American Congressman has introduced a resolution in the House of Representatives condemning Hinduphobia, anti-Hindu bigotry, hate and intolerance.

The resolution that was introduced by Congressman Shri Thanedar on Wednesday has been referred to the House Committee on Oversight and Accountability. The resolution reads that despite their positive contributions to the United States, Hindu Americans face stereotypes and disinformation about their heritage and symbols, and have been the targets of bullying in schools and on college campuses, as well as discrimination, hate speech, and bias-motivated crimes.

According to the FBI's Hate Crimes Statistics Report, anti-Hindu hate crimes targeting mandirs and persons are annually on the rise while in parallel Hinduphobia in

American society is unfortunately rising, the resolution said. Noting that the United States has welcomed more than four million Hindus from all corners of the world since the 1900s, representing diverse racial, linguistic, and ethnic backgrounds, the resolution asserts that the country has greatly benefited from contributions by Hindu Americans in every aspect of the nation's economy and every industry.

About a fortnight ago, Indian-American Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi, Ro Khanna, Thanedar, Ami Bera and Pramila Jayapal had written to the Department of Justice to request a briefing from them on the status of investigations concerning an alarming increase in incidents of vandalism at houses of worship across the country including at Hindu temples to better understand existing law enforcement coordination between local agencies, the FBI, and the Civil Rights Division. *—PTI*

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

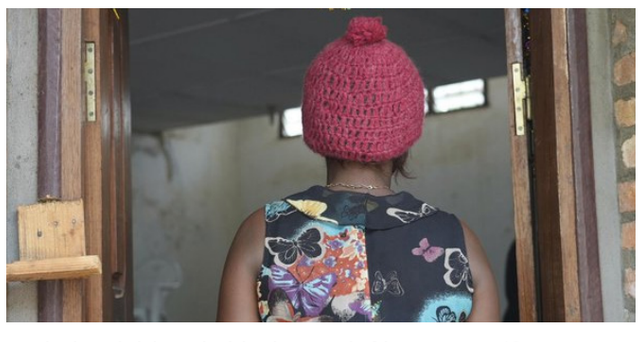
Sexual assaults on the rise amid conflict

BANGUI, 12 APRIL

It was too late for the mother to shield her children when the two masked and armed Russian fighters burst into her home, held her at gunpoint and took turns raping her.

Her five children were forced to watch in the dark. Seated in a restaurant in Central African Republic's capital, where she has since fled, she wiped away tears. Two years on, the assault has "stayed with me in my core," she said.

Associated Press does not identify survivors of sexual assault. She blamed the Russians who are part of the Wagner mercenary group that operates alongside Central African Republic's army and has been accused by locals and rights groups of abuses. She had seen them patrolling in her town of Bambari before. On the day of the assault, they were fighting rebels there.



Gender-based violence is rising in Central Africa***PHOTO: X/@WASHTIMES***

Gender-based violence is rising in Central African Republic amid ongoing conflict, weak legal and care systems and the stigma of speaking up, locals and aid groups say. Since 2020, incidents have jumped from about 9,200 reported cases to 25,500, according to cases tracked by the UN and partners.

But international funding for the country has dropped, with gender-based violence receiving some of the least support. The humanitarian request for about USD 14 million received less than 15 per cent of that, according to the UN. Central African Republic has been in conflict since 2013, when predominantly Muslim rebels seized power and forced the president from office. Mostly Christian militias fought back. A 2019 peace deal only lessened the fighting, and six of the 14 armed groups that signed later left the agreement. *—AP*

Apple issues spyware attack warning to users

WASHINGTON, 12 APRIL

Apple sent notifications to individuals in 92 countries warning them that they may have been the target of mercenary spyware attacks, TechCrunch reports. "Apple detected that you are being targeted by a mercenary spyware attack that is trying to remotely compromise the iPhone associated with your Apple ID -xxx-," it said. Apple's alert went on to share additional information about the incident. "This attack is likely targeting you specifically because of who you are or what you do. Although it's never possible to achieve absolute certainty when detecting such attacks, Apple has high confidence in this warning please take it seriously," the alert continued. Apple explained that it couldn't provide any information about what prompted the message out of concern that additional information would help attackers avoid future detection. The company did investigations to pinpoint attacks. *—ANI*

PHOTO: PTI

AC companies seek to cash in on scorching summer

NEW DELHI, 12 APRIL

India Meteorological Department's (IMD) forecast of a more than longer heatwave this summer, has given a reason to cheer for the air conditioner manufacturers. AC makers in India are ready with their stocks and are also launching a new range of summer appliances for the mass market.

Voltas achieved the highest ever AC sales in the just concluded year 2023-24. The company achieved over two million AC units during the year, with a volume growth of 35 per cent. The company attributed the sales growth to a consistent demand for cooling products during the year, among others. Blue Star, another major in this space, this week launched a range of room ACs. The company noted that the market is witnessing significant demand owing to burgeoning middle-class consumers with higher disposable incomes. Also, with scorching heat room ACs are increasingly becoming more of a necessity than a luxury.On 2024 summer, he said the forthcoming season is going to be strong and he expected the demand for room ACs to be robust. Hitachi, another major player in the cooling space, introduced a smart range of ACs. The wi-fi-enabled ACs start at Rs 39,000 and will be available for consumers across all leading outlets and e-commerce platforms. LKP Securities, a financial advisory company, noted that room AC demand across India has picked up now as the temperature has started going up across India. It said pricing has remained largely the same but the margins given to the dealers and distributors have come down.

Voltas saw highest ever AC sales in concluded year 2023-24 **PHOTO: PTI**

Talking specifically of North India, it said that the demand has surged since last week and more buying is seen which is expected to increase. In South India, too it said demand has been better compared to other regions as summer sets in much earlier there.

Most parts of the country are likely to witness above normal maximum temperatures during April to June, with 10-20 days of heat waves expected in different parts, IMD said recently. *—ANI*

Rupee falls 13 paise to close at 83.44 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 12 APRIL

The rupee depreciated 13 paise to close at 83.44 against the US dollar on Friday, weighed down by a massive sell-off in domestic equities and a strong greenback against major crosses overseas. Forex traders said elevated crude oil prices also dented investor sentiments.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.36 and touched an intraday low of 83.44 against the greenback. The local unit finally settled at 83.44, registering a loss of 13 paise from its previous close. On Wednesday, rupee closed flat at 83.31 against US dollar. Forex markets were closed on Thursday on account of Eid-Ul-Fitr. The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.51 per cent higher at 105.82. *—PTI*

Gold gains ₹1,050 to breach ₹73K mark

NEW DELHI, 12 APRIL

Gold and silver prices rallied for the fourth straight session and hit fresh peaks on Friday, with the yellow metal gaining sharply by Rs 1,050 to breach Rs 73,000 per 10 grams level amid bullish global trend. According to HDFC Securities, gold price surged Rs 1,050 to hit its lifetime high of Rs 73,350 per 10 grams in Delhi. It had closed at Rs 72,300 per 10 grams in the previous session. Similarly, silver prices zoomed Rs 1,400 to hit a new record of Rs 86,300 per kg. "Spot gold (24 carats) prices in the Delhi markets are trading at a record high of Rs 73,350 per 10 grams, up by Rs 1,050, taking positive cues from overseas markets," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said. Commodity markets were partially closed on Thursday on account of Eid-Ul-Fitr. In the global markets, spot gold at Comex traded at USD 2,388 per ounce, up USD 48 from the previous closing level. In addition, silver was also quoting higher at USD 28.95 per ounce. *—PTI*

Godfrey Phillips to exit retail business division '24Seven'

NEW DELHI, 12 APRIL

Cigarette maker Godfrey Phillips India on Friday said it has decided to exit from its loss-making retail business 24Seven. The board of the company in a meeting held on Friday "decided to exit from carrying out the business operations of its Retail Business Division," said a regulatory update from Godfrey Phillips India. Godfrey Phillips India was operating 150 stores/kiosks of 24Seven as of December 2023. A decision in this regard was taken following a detailed review of the company's retail business division and after due consideration of the stakeholders' feedback, long-term performance, prevailing market conditions of the retail sector and long-term business strategy of the company, it added. Revenue of 24Seven in FY23 was Rs 396 crore, contributing 9.3 per cent of the total revenue from operations for the company. Godfrey Phillips India is the flagship company of Modi Enterprises. It makes popular cigarette brands like Four Square, Red & White, Cavanders, North Pole and Tipper. *—PTI*

Air India operationalises 5 new contact centres

NEW DELHI, 12 APRIL

Air India has operationalised five new contact centres, including in Cairo and Kuala Lumpur, to provide assistance to its customers worldwide. The Tata Group-owned airline has partnered with Concentrix, a California-headquartered customer engagement firm, to manage premium services from centres in Mumbai, Cairo, and Kuala Lumpur. Besides, the carrier has signed up iEnergizer to operate contact centres in Noida and Bengaluru, focusing on domestic inquiries, a release said on Friday. Recently, Air India introduced a premium desk for its premium frequent flyer members as well as business and first-class guests. *—PTI*

Sensex, Nifty tank 1% after record-breaking rally

Nifty declines by 234.40 points or 1.03 per cent on Friday

NEW DELHI, 12 APRIL

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty plunged by 1 per cent on Friday as investors booked profits after a recent record-breaking rally amid weak trends from Asian markets.

The 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 793.25 points or 1.06 per cent to settle at 74,244.90 with 27 of its components in the red. During the day, it dropped 848.84 points or 1.13 per cent to 74,189.31.

The NSE Nifty declined 234.40 points or 1.03 per cent to close at 22,519.40 with 45 of its constituents ending lower.

From the Sensex basket, Sun Pharma, Maruti, Power Grid, Titan, JSW Steel, Tech Mahindra, Larsen & Toubro and State Bank of India were the major laggards.

Tata Motors, Tata Consultancy Services and Nestle were the gainers.

In Asian markets, Tokyo settled in the positive territory while Seoul, Shanghai and Hong Kong ended lower.

European markets were trading in the positive zone. Wall Street ended mostly with gains on Thursday.

"US inflation soared by 0.4% MoM, surpassing expectations and triggering a spike in US Treasury yields. Investors are questioning the feasibility of the US Fed's anticipated three rate cuts this year, leading to underperformance in EMs. Meanwhile, European markets excelled as the ECB maintained policy rates but hinted at a potential rate cut soon.

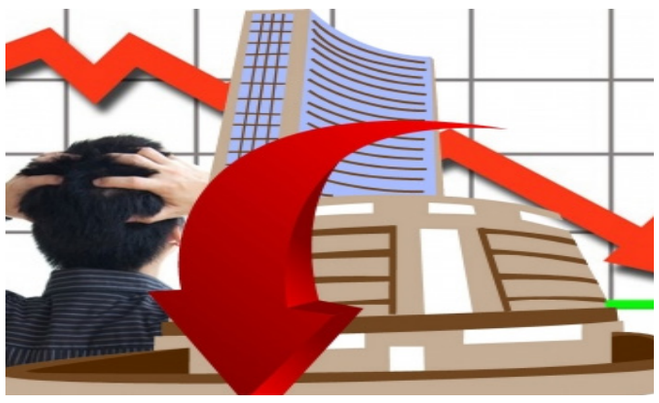
"Indian markets consolidated amidst worries over delayed US rate cuts, escalating Middle East tensions driving oil prices up, and subdued Q4 earnings projections," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

Post-market hours, TCS announced its Q4 earnings. Industrial production for February and inflation data for March was scheduled for release later in the day.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.95 per cent to USD 90.56 a barrel.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 2,778.17 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

The BSE benchmark climbed 354.45 points or 0.47 per cent to settle at an all-time high of 75,038.15 on Wednesday. The Nifty advanced by 111.05 points or 0.49 per cent to reach a record closing peak of 22,753.80. During the day, it jumped 132.95 points or 0.58 per cent to hit a lifetime intraday peak of 22,775.70. *—PTI*



Tata Motors, Tata Consultancy Services and Nestle were the gainers **PHOTO: PTI**

- In Asian markets, Tokyo settled in the positive territory while Seoul, Shanghai and Hong Kong ended lower

ECONOMIC BOOST

Indian real estate to reach $1.5T value by 2034: CII

NEW DELHI, 12 APRIL

The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and Knight Frank India report, forecasts India's real estate sector, to reach a value of USD 1.5 trillion by 2034.

The report titled 'Indian Real Estate: A Decade from Now' says the growth trajectory is anticipated to bolster India's economic output, with the real estate sector poised to contribute 10.5 per cent to the nation's GDP over next ten years.

Against the backdrop of India's growing urban population, which is projected to reach 1.55 billion by 2034, the demand for housing is expected to skyrocket to reach an estimated value of USD 906 billion by 2034.

Urban centres across the country will require 78 million new homes between 2024 and 2034.

Notably, this surge in demand is anticipated to span across various income brackets, from affordable housing to luxury segments, catering to the diverse needs of India's evolving demographic landscape.

Neel Raheja, Chairman of CII's National Committee on Real Estate and Housing, expressed unwavering optimism about the sector's prospects.

The commercial real estate sector is also poised for an exponential ascent, with projections indicating a requirement of 2.7 billion square feet of office space by 2034.

The report underscores the pivotal role of Tier 2 and 3 cities in driving this growth, propelled by factors such as business expansion, infrastructure development, and the rise of IT and services industries.

Global Capability Centres (GCCs) is expected to be a key driver, with an estimated 2,880 GCCs anticipated to be operational in India by 2034.

The report also sheds light on the retail sector, forecasting a substantial increase in organized retail consumption by 2034. *—ANI*

Moody's maintains stable outlook

NEW DELHI, 12 APRIL

Rating agency Moody's maintained outlook for the government of India to be stable. The long-term and short-term ratings of the government of India is pegged at Baa3 and P-3, respectively.

The stable outlook incorporates the likelihood that India's fiscal metrics will continue to gradually improve amid robust growth prospects compared with peers.

Maintaining stable outlook, Moody's noted India balances its large and diversified economy with high growth potential, a relatively sound external position, and a stable domestic financing base for government debt against high general government debt, weak debt affordability and low per capita income.

A stronger and more stable economy has emerged from the pandemic, said Moody's although it does not expect a material reduction in debt amid gradual fiscal consolidation over the next year.

It also asserted that India benefited from infrastructure development, digitalization and the rehabilitation of the financial system.

Moody's Ratings has completed a periodic review of the ratings of India and other ratings that are associated. The review was conducted through a rating committee held on April 4, 2024.

In a report released by Moody's in March, the global rating agency said it expected India's economic growth in 2024-25 growth above that of other emerging market G20 peers, given its domestic demand managed to sustain momentum.

India's GDP grew at a massive 8.4 per cent during the October-December quarter of the current financial year 2023-24 and the country continued to remain the fastest-growing major economy. The Indian economy grew 7.8 per cent and 7.6 per cent during the preceding two quarters - April-June and July-September.

India's economy grew 7.2 per cent in 2022-23 and 8.7 per cent in 2021-22, respectively. *—ANI*

India's GDP grew at a massive 8.4 per cent during the October-December **PHOTO: ANI**

DRIVEN BY PPP

ADB raises GDP to 7%

NEW DELHI, 12 APRIL

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has upgraded India's gross domestic product (GDP) growth forecast for financial year 2024 from 6.7 per cent to 7 per cent and 7.2 per cent in financial year 2025.

The upward revision in the economic growth forecasts are driven by robust public and private investment and strong services sector, as per the regional development bank, which released its flagship economic publication, Asian Development Outlook (ADO) April 2024, on Thursday.

The triggers for growth in financial year 2024 will come from higher capital expenditure on infrastructure development both by central and state governments, rise in private corporate investment, strong service sector performance and improved consumer confidence.Growth momentum will pick up in financial year 2025 backed by improved goods exports and an increase in manufacturing productivity and agricultural output.

India's GDP grew at a massive 8.4 per cent during the October-December quarter of the current financial year 2023-24 and the country continued to remain the fastest-growing major economy. The Indian economy grew 7.8 per cent and 7.6 per cent during the preceding two quarters - April-June and July-September. India's economy grew 7.2 per cent in 2022-23 and 8.7 per cent in 2021-22, respectively.

A healthy rise of 17 per cent in central government capital expenditure in financial year 2024 compared to the previous fiscal year together with transfers to state governments will boost infrastructure investment, ADB said.The new initiative to support urban housing for middle-income households is expected to further spur housing growth. Private corporate investment is expected to get a boost with stable interest rates. *—ANI*

PHOTO: PTI

VODAFONE IDEA ANNOUNCES RS 18,000-CR FPO

NEW DELHI, 12 APRIL

Cash-strapped Vodafone Idea Limited (VIL) on Friday announced a follow-on public offer of up to Rs 18,000 crore at a price band of Rs 10-11 per share, marking the biggest FPO in the country. The fundraise -- which comes close on the heels of a Rs 2,075-crore fund infusion by Aditya Birla group via a preferential share issue earlier this month, would give the ailing telco the firepower to improve its positioning in the Indian telecom market, where it currently trails larger rivals such as Reliance Jio and Bharti Airtel, by a wide margin.

The funds would also help VIL shore up finances for the much-delayed 5G rollout and strengthening 4G services, and in payment of vendor dues.

VIL has been hemorrhaging subscribers month-after-month, and fighting a desperate battle for survival saddled with debt of Rs 2.1 lakh crore and quarterly losses.

According to a statutory filing on Friday, VIL's follow-on offer will open on 18 April and close on 22 April.

Vodafone Idea shares, however, tanked in early trade following the announcement of the Rs 18,000-crore FPO.

The floor price for the mega offer has been set at Rs 10 and the cap at Rs 11 per equity share.

The higher-end of the price band (Rs 11) is at a discount of about 26 per cent compared to recently approved preferential issue price to the promoter entity at Rs 14.87 and a discount of about 15 per cent compared to last closing price of Rs 12.95.

A minimum bid lot will be 1,298 equity shares and in the multiples of 1,298 equity shares, thereafter, the company said. *—PTI*

'Firm economic growth helped automobile industry'

NEW DELHI, 12 APRIL

Backed by robust economic growth and conducive government, the Indian automobile industry has posted a satisfactory performance with sales growing by 12.5 per cent during the just-concluded financial year.

During 2023-24, total domestic sales rose from 2.12 million units to 2.38 million units, data released by Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM) showed Friday. Cetegory wise, passenger vehicle sales rose 8.4 per cent, three wheelers 41.5 per cent, two wheelers 13.3 per cent, commercial vehicles marginally by 0.6 per cent.

Passenger vehicle segment led the growth with overall sales touching almost 5-million units including 4.2 million domestic (growth of 8.4 per cent) and 0.7 million exports.Two-wheeler segment continued the recovery path with a handsome growth of over 13 per cent in domestic sales to almost 18 million units, even though still lower than the earlier peak of 21 million units in 2018-19.

Domestic commercial vehicle industry had a marginal growth to 9.7 million units and within that, some drop was experienced in light commercial vehicles and small commercial vehicles due to degrowth in the CNG segment.

Accordig to SIAM, the growth in commercial vehicles was impacted due to migration to higher tonnage trucks which created higher payload capacity, that it asserted is not reflected in the number of units.Coming to three wheeler industry, it is almost close to the earlier peak of 0.7 million units in 2018-19. *—PTI*

During 2023-24, total domestic sales rose from 2.12 million units to 2.38 million units **PHOTO: PTI**

NEW INITIATIVE

'Swiggy Pawlice' allows users to report missing pet on app

NEW DELHI, 12 APRIL

Pet parents can now report missing pets on the Swiggy app for harnessing the network of its delivery partners in the search efforts, under an initiative called 'Swiggy Pawlice' unveiled by the on-demand convenience platform.

Swiggy launched the feature on the occasion of National Pet Day, which was on 11 April.

The company also said it will support employees on pet care and adoption with the introduction of a 'Paw-ternity' policy.

CEO of Swiggy Food Marketplace, Rohit Kapoor, said, "As a pet parent myself, I understand first-hand the worry and anguish that accompanies the thought of a pet going missing. While I sincerely hope that such a distressing event never occurs to any fellow pet parent, if it does, Swiggy Pawlice stands ready to be a dependable resource to assist them." Pet parents can report their missing pets directly through the Swiggy app, providing all necessary details and pictures.

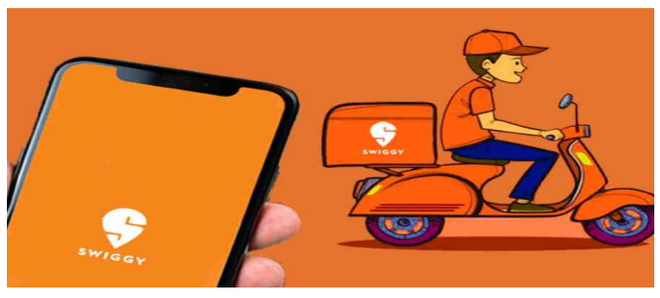
The company said it will utilise its network of over 3.5 lakh delivery partners in the initiative.

"Given they spend a good amount of time out and about, either delivering orders or resting between orders, Swiggy's delivery partners are uniquely positioned to offer assistance. There have been numerous instances where their presence and mobility have proved invaluable, allowing them to readily lend a helping hand to those in need," the company stated.

If a delivery partner spots a missing pet, they need to inform a team at Swiggy, providing details and location.

They have been communicated not to retrieve the pet themselves.

The Swiggy team will then share the details with the pet parent, enabling them to visit



Swiggy launched the feature on the occasion of National Pet Day, which was on 11 April **PHOTO: PTI**

- The company also said it will support employees on pet care and adoption with the introduction of a 'Paw-ternity' policy

Billie Jean King Cup: India beat South Korea 2-1

NEW DELHI, 12 APRIL

India picked up their third victory in the Billie Jean King Cup as they defeated South Korea 2-1 in a Asia Oceania Group-1 tie in Changsha, China on Friday. With the win, India have moved up to the second spot in Pool A after three wins and one loss. Against Korea, world No. 379 Rutuja Bhosale gave India the early lead by securing a facile 6-2 6-2 win against Sohyun Park. The Koreans, however, drew parity when Ankita Raina went down 2-6 3-6 against Sujeong Jang. But Ankita made amends in the doubles fixture. Alongside Prarthana Thombare, the Indian duo warded off the Korean combine of Park and Dabin Kim 6-4 6-4 in one hour and 33 minutes. India had earlier defeated Pacific Oceania (3-0) and Chinese Taipei (2-1). *—PTI*

3 Indian shooters aim for Paris quota in Pistol event

RIO DE JANEIRO, 12 APRIL

Three Indian women air pistol shooters are all set to begin their quest for the lone remaining quota place left to be won in the pistol discipline overall, as the International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF) Final Olympic Qualification Championship Rifle / Pistol, gets underway in the Brazilian city of Rio De Janeiro from Friday. Two teenagers, Asian Games champion Palak and Chandigarh's Sainyam, as well as Palak's Haryana teammate Surbhi Rao, will try and claim the second Paris Olympics quota place in Women's 10m Air Pistol. Palak, Sainyam and Surbhi, currently ranked third, fifth and sixth in the discipline in India, take aim for the qualification round, with the top eight qualifiers competing in the final on Sunday. *—ANI*

Australia to open Formula 1 in 2025

LONDON, 12 APRIL

Lewis Hamilton's first race in a Ferrari will be in Australia. Next year's Formula 1 season will open in Melbourne for the first time since 2019 after the full calendar for 2025 was revealed Friday. The Australian Grand Prix in Melbourne will be the opening race because the Bahrain and Saudi Arabian rounds of the F1 championship — the first two races of this year — are shifting to mid-April dates to avoid a clash with the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Next year, seven-time champion Hamilton will be starting a new era in his career when he switches to Ferrari for 2025. That will follow 12 years with Mercedes, where Hamilton has won six titles. The schedule stays at 24 races — a record length for F1. *—AP*

Shuttler Sukant gears up for Para Badminton 2024

MADRID, 12 APRIL

With a month away from the Paris Paralympics, ace shuttler Sukant Kadam is all geared up for a strong show at the upcoming Spanish Para-Badminton 2024. The shuttler has a busy April with another level 1 Spanish International following this tournament. Kadam said he has been training hard on his shortfalls to make no errors while playing against his opposition. "I have been working on my shortfalls, the idea is to not make the mistakes that I did in the earlier tournaments. I worked with my coach and I hope I am able to implement them," Sukant Kadam said in an official statement. Kadam stated that he is leaving no "stone unturned" to prepare for the Paris Paralympics and wanted to give his best in every tournament. *—ANI*

Candidates Chess: Gukesh loses to Alireza

Praggnanandhaa holds Caruana

Under massive pressure on the clock, 17-year-old #Gukesh loses to Alireza Firouzja as he lets slip chance to become sole leader at the halfway stage of the #FIDECandidates. The expression says it all!

PHOTO: X@IEXPRESSSPORTS

TORONTO, 12 APRIL

Grandmaster D Gukesh slipped from the joint top spot after suffering his first defeat, at the hands of Frenchman Firouza Alireza, but teen prodigy R Praggnanandhaa played out an easy draw with American Fabiano Caruana in the seventh round of the Candidates chess tournament here.

Following the loss, the 17-year-old Gukesh was down to the joint second spot on four points along with Caruana and Praggnanandhaa.

Russia's Ian Nepomniachtchi regained his slender half-point lead inching to 4.5 points out of a possible seven at the halfway stage following a draw with American Hikaru Nakamura. After a draw with Nijat Abasov, Vidit Gujrathi took his tally to 3.5 points to share the fifth spot with Nakamura while Alireza pulled himself up a little on 2.5 points to take the seventh spot. Abasov with two points is still in the last place.

In the women's section, R Vaishali seemed to have run out of steam as she suffered her third loss in the event. Tingjie Lei of China proved too good for the Indian on a day when the other three games ended in draws. Zhongyi Tan of China remained half a point ahead of the pack after drawing with closest rival Aleksandra Goryachkina of Russia.

Kateryna Lagno, Russia, played out a draw with Nurgyul Salimova of Bulgaria and in the other game of the day, Anna Muzychuk signed peace with India's Koneru Humpy. The Indian challenge in the women's section might already have ended as Zhongyi stood firmly ahead on five points while Goryachkina had 4.5 points in her kitty.

Lagno and Lei shared the third spot on four points each and Salimova, on three, was occupying the sole fifth position.

Humpy, Vaishali and Muzychuk need a miracle in the second half of the event to make a comeback as the trio has just 2.5 points.

With an exchange and a pawn plus, Nakamura put up stiff defense against his vulnerable king but Nepomniachtchi won the queen eventually for three pieces to force a draw.

Tingjie won in style against Vaishali, who did not have many answers against a king side attack out of an Italian opening.

The Indian got a balanced middle game but the position started to drift in the Chinese favour in the middle game ultimately allowing a Knight sacrifice. The game lasted 36 moves.

—PTI

RR need better execution of plans against PBKS

MULLANPUR, 12 APRIL

A disappointed Rajasthan Royals will have to focus on better execution of their strategies for a swift turnaround when they face a highly inconsistent yet capable Punjab Kings in their Indian Premier League match on Saturday.

Royals had an excellent chance to register their fifth win on the trot and consolidate their totem pole position, but Rashid Khan's daring assault helped Gujarat Titans snatch a last-ball victory on Wednesday.

Sanju Samson-led Rajasthan outfit lost to Titans because of the below-par effort from Kuldip Sen (19th over) and Avesh Khan (20th over) at a vital passage, when they conceded 35 runs across 12 balls.

The absence of injured Liam Livingstone from the middle-order too has reduced their firepower, and Kings will hope to have the Englishman back in their ranks at the earliest.

On the contrary, the Punjab bowlers have done marginally better, but their propensity to concede big runs while bowling first will be a concern.As a result, they have managed to qualify for the play-offs only twice across the last six seasons.

—PTI

RR players Chahal and Powell during practice at Maharaja Yadavindra Singh International Cricket Stadium, in Mohali, on Friday ***PHOTO: PTI***

It's in my muscle memory: Suryakumar on his shots

MUMBAI, 12 APRIL

The world's number one T20 batter, Suryakumar Yadav attributed the audacious array of shots he played against Royal Challengers Bengaluru to "muscle memory" and constant practice at nets.

Suryakumar dazzled with a 19-ball 52 studded with four sixes and five fours to help Mumbai Indians chase down RCB's 197-run target in just 15.3 overs.Suryakumar was playing in his second match of this IPL after recovering from a sports hernia surgery."It is always good to be back in Wankhede. Joining the squad was great. Mentally I was here, just physically in Bangalore (for recovery at NCA)," said the 33-year-old. *—PTI*

TODAY'S MATCH

PUNJAB KINGS vs RAJASTHAN ROYALS

Time: 7.30 pm

Where To Watch: Jio Cinema, Star Sports Network

Stadium: Yadavindra Singh Stadium, Punjab

Fans will start loving him: Kishan backs Hardik

Mumbai, 12 April

Hardik Pandya might have been at the receiving end of fans' ire in this IPL, but Ishan Kishan has little doubt that the Mumbai Indians skipper is "enjoying the challenge" of winning them over.

Pandya, who replaced Rohit Sharma as the regular skipper of Mumbai before the start of this IPL, has been consistently getting booed by the spectators inside the stadium and the situation was no different on Thursday night when MI faced Royal Challengers Bengaluru. *—PTI*

ROHIT PLANS TO PLAY 50-OVER WC, WTC FINAL

NEW DELHI, 12 APRIL

With the hurt of India's defeats to Australia in the WTC and the World Cup finals still burning his mind, skipper Rohit Sharma nourishes the dream of playing in those tournaments' upcoming editions in 2025 and 2027.

The 36-year-old Rohit was part of India's 2007 T20 World Cup victory, but he counts the 50-over showpiece as the real stuff.

Six months have passed since India succumbed to Australia in the World Cup final at Ahmedabad, but Rohit found it tough to come to terms with that defeat. The Mumbaikar eventually found a shelter in that ready answer – one bad day on the field.

However, Rohit found some solace in India's resounding 4-1 Test series win over England recently at home. But the Indian captain said the series was not a cakewalk as the eventual score line suggested.

Batting at No 6, Rohit made a 301-ball 177 against the West Indies at Kolkata, which was also the farewell series of Sachin Tendulkar. Rohit, who has not missed a season of Indian Premier League since its inception in 2008, said now there was no weak team in the league, a remarkable shape shifting from its early years. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X@CRICCRAZYJOHNS

MONTE-CARLO MASTERS

Tsitsipas sails past Khachanov, reaches SF

MONTE CARLO, 12 APRIL

World No. 12 Stefanos Tsitsipas' resurgence continued at the Monte-Carlo Masters as the Greek eased past Karen Khachanov to reach the semi-finals at the ATP Masters 1000 event on Friday.

The World No. 12 registered a 6-4, 6-2 triumph against Khachanov for a place in the semis.

After taking some strong early shots from Khachanov, Tsitsipas remained unwavering and went on to defeat his opponent, who was ranked just five spots lower in the ATP Rankings, in 83 minutes.

Tsitsipas entered the Principality with a modest 11-6 record for 2024, but it seems that returning to the venue where he won back-to-back titles in 2021 and 2022 has energized him. The 25-year-old Greek will now try to make it to his third appearance in a championship match in Monte-Carlo when he faces either Holger Rune or Jannik Sinner in the final four.

According to ATP Stats, the Greek won 84 per cent (27/32) of the points after first serves, extending his lead in the Lexus ATP Head2Head over Khachanov to 8-1.

At 2-2 in the second set, Khachanov called the physiotherapist to treat his leg, but he was able to move freely until the match's conclusion. But after giving Tsitsipas a break for 3-2 with an easy overhead miss, he was clearly upset and could not generate a break point on his next serve in the second set.

—ANI

Stefanos Tsitsipas eased to a 6-4, 6-2 triumph over Karen Khachanov to reach semi-finals at the Rolex Monte-Carlo Masters ***PHOTO: X@PLAYBET***

Olympics: Mary Kom steps down as Chef-de-Mission

NEW DELHI, 12 APRIL

Six-time world champion boxer MC Mary Kom on Friday stepped down as India's chef-de-mission for the upcoming Paris Olympics, saying she is "left with no choice" due to some personal reasons.

Indian Olympic Association (IOA) President PT Usha announced that Mary Kom had asked to be relieved from her position in a letter addressed to her. "I consider it an honour to serve my country in every way possible, and I was mentally prepared for it. However, I regret that I will not be able to uphold the prestigious responsibility and would like to resign, owing to personal reasons," the 41-year-old stated in a letter to Usha.

"It is embarrassing to retreat from a commitment, which I seldom do, but I am left with no choice. I am there to cheer on my country and the athletes competing in this Olympic Games, with great expectations," she added. The IOA had announced her appointment on 21 March.

The celebrated boxer, who is also a bronze-medallist from the 2012 London Olympics, was to be the logistical in-charge of the country's contingent at July 26-August 11 Games. "We are sad that Olympic medal winning boxer and Chairperson of the IOA Athletes Commission Mary Kom has stepped down citing personal reasons. We respect her decision and her privacy," Usha said in a statement.

"I shall make the appropriate consultations and soon make an announcement about the replacement for Mary Kom." Usha said she had a conversation with Mary Kom after receiving her letter.

—PTI

Federation preventing me from competing: Vinesh

NEW DELHI, 12 APRIL

World Championships medallist Vinesh Phogat on Friday accused Wrestling Federation of India president Sanjay Singh of trying to stop her from competing in Olympic Qualifiers by creating logistical hurdles for her support staff, saying she is also fearful of being trapped in a doping case.

The 29-year-old Phogat, who won 53kg bronze medals in the 2019 and 2022 World Championships besides a gold in the 2018 Asian Games (in 50kg), would be eyeing an Olympic quota in the 50kg category in the Asian qualifying tournament next week in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

At the selection trials in Patiala, she had also competed in the 53kg category after the authorities allowed her but lost in the semifinals.

Phogat alleged that her personal coach and physio were being denied accreditation for the Asian Olympic qualifying tournament starting 19 April.

Phogat was one of the three top wrestlers of the country who led a protracted protest against former WFI President Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, accusing him of sexually harassing women wrestlers.

After a case was filed against Brij Bhushan by Delhi Police, a local court granted him bail in July. *—PTI*

4TH CONSECUTIVE LOSS

India loses 1-3 to Aussie in 4th hockey test

PERTH, 12 APRIL

India continued their dismal show in the crucial tour Down Under, losing 1-3 against Australia to suffer their fourth consecutive defeat in the five-match men's hockey Test series, on Friday.

Contrary to the final result, it was a much-improved performance from the Indians but the Kookaburras were simply too strong.

All the four goals in the match, which started 40 minutes late due to lightning, came from penalty corners.

India took the lead in the 12th minute through skipper Harmanpreet Singh but Jeremy Hayward's (19th, 47th) brace and Jack Welch (54th) strike handed Australia yet another win in the series.

India was decimated 1-5 in the opening Test, while it lost the second and third Tests 2-4 and 1-2 respectively ***PHOTO: X/@TheHockeyIndia***

India were decimated 1-5 in the opening Test, while they lost the second and third Tests 2-4 and 1-2 respectively.

India had the first shy at the goal in the opening minute through Mandeep Singh, whose hit from the top of the circle off skipper Harmanpreet's Singh's pass from the deep was saved by an alert Australian keeper.

The Kookaburras were not to be left behind as they secured back-to-back penalty corners in the second minute but veteran India goalkeeper PR Sreejesh was superb under the bar, making twin saves to deny their opponents.

Unlike the previous three games where they relied more on aerial long passes to penetrate the Australian defence, the Indians used the midfield smartly, building their attacks with fine ball transfer. *—PTI*